Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama

Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition

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Michael Lockwood and A.Vishnu Bhat

Tambaram Research Associates

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Preface

In 1963, Lionel Abel's book, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, was published. In that book Abel introduced a new term to describe what he thought was the only form possible to the contemporary playwright who wishes to treat a subject gravely. He held that tragedy, invented by the Greeks to describe pain and yet give pleasure, is unrealizable today. In the late Renaissance, a revolution occurred in human consciousness which made tragedy impossible. But playwrights such as Calderón and Shakespeare wrote 'serious' plays which were self-reflexive: the illusion that sustains the play worlds also sustains the world outside the plays – the so-called 'real world'.

Abel's theory of metatheater is not a simple one, and it is, perhaps, better to look at a later analysis of this and related terms: 'metadrama', 'metaplay', etc.

The basic idea of metatheater is of multiple 'layers' of illusion. The prefix, 'meta-', here, suggests 'beyond', 'above', or 'within'. Metatheater, in one of its senses, can be viewed as one make-believe (dramatic) world superimposed upon another make-believe (dramatic) world. Or as one dramatic world framed within another dramatic world. The most easily understandable example of this relationship is the 'play-within-the-play'. Of course, this idea did not first come into being in the age of Calderón and Shakespeare. The idea of multiple layers of illusion is as old as theater itself. But it is only since Abel's book was published in 1963 that a whole area of criticism and theory has sprung up in the West under the general heading of 'metatheater' or 'metadrama'.

Richard Hornby, in his book, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986), has given a clear and concise analysis of different types of 'metatheater/metadrama':

1. **The play within the play:**
   i) the *Inset* type – the *inner* play is *secondary*
   ii) the *Framed* type – the *inner* play is *primary*
2. **The ceremony within the play:**
   In all cultures we find plays that contain feasts, balls, pageants, tournaments, games, rituals, trials, inquests, processions, funerals, coronations, etc.
3. **Role playing within the role:**
   i) Voluntary, ii) Involuntary, iii) Allegorical
4. **Literary and real-life references:**
   i) Citation, ii) Allegory, iii) Parody, and iv) Adaptation
5. **Self-reference:**
   The play directly calls attention to itself as a play, an imaginative fiction.

The question might be asked what relevance such a recent topic of literary criticism in the West would have to a study of ancient Sanskrit drama. Each of the essays in Part One of this book provides, we hope, an effective answer. In our sixth essay, we translate the passage in the *Abhinavabhāratī* wherein Abhinavagupta comments upon the term '*nāṭyāyita*'. Remarkably, the ancient Sanskrit term is most appropriately translated by the freshly minted English word, 'metatheater'! And it is through an understanding of this 30-year-old English term (metatheater) that we are able to obtain a revealing insight into what Abhinava was saying a thousand years ago about '*nāṭyāyita*', a term used in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, in the section, *Śārīra Abhinaya*, and illustrated by Abhinava with a reference to Subandhu's play, *Vāsavadattā Nāṭyadhāra*.

Michael Lockwood and A. Vishnu Bhat
Tambaram, 1994

Remarks on the Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition

We have added three essays to Part One, which broaden our investigation of the role of metatheater in Sanskrit drama.

We have also revised our translation of various passages of the two plays of King Mahēndravarman, in Part Two.

Michael Lockwood and A. Vishnu Bhat
Tambaram, 2005

PART ONE

Essays on Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama

PART ONE

Contents

Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation

Vowels

अ a (mic*a*)	इ i (f*i*ll)	उ u (r*u*le)	ए ē (pr*e*y)	ओ ō (g*o*)	ऋ ṛ (mer*ri*ly)
आ ā (f*a*ther)	ई ī (pol*i*ce)	ऊ ū (r*u*de)	ऐ ai (*ai*sle)	औ au (*ow*l)	

Anusvāra – ं = *ṁ* = nasal *m* or *n*

Visarga – ः = *ḥ* = voiceless aspiration

Consonants

Voiceless Unaspirated	Voiceless Aspirated	Voiced Unaspirated	Voiced Aspirated	Nasal
क् k	ख् kh	ग् g	घ् gh	ङ् ṅ
च् c	छ् ch	ज् j	झ् jh	ञ् ñ
ट् ṭ	ठ् ṭh	ड् ḍ	ढ् ḍh	ण् ṇ
त् t	थ् th	द् d	ध् dh	न् n
प् p	फ् ph	ब् b	भ् bh	म् m

Semi-vowels	Sibilants & Voiced *h*:
य् y	ष् ṣ
र् r	श् ś
ळ् ḷ	स् s
ल् l	ह् h
व् v	

1

Sanskrit Drama – Its Continuity of Structure*

The classical Sanskrit play develops in two major stages. First, there is a kind of pre-natal stage, which is the prologue or introduction. This leads directly to the second stage, the play proper. The prologue opens with a prayer of invocation (the Nāndī), and the play proper closes with a prayer of benediction (the Bharatavākyam).

The Nāndī must originally have been a simple prayer invoking God's blessing and protection for the performance, performers, and audience. However, the classical dramatists have taken this body of verse and infused it with genetic elements of the play, itself. This group of elements is the first source of the organic continuity in the structure of a Sanskrit play. The elements are in the form of suggestive meanings (*dhvani*) of words and passages which go beyond the mere surface level. They may hint at the various characters of the play and suggest something of the nature of the play. The Nāndī, thus, becomes the embryo of the play, its elements difficult to distinguish. At a first reading or hearing of the Nāndī, it would be practically impossible for the sharpest of minds to make out the (suggestive) significance of these elements. But as the play proceeds, it becomes possible to grasp their meaning.

Immediately following the Nāndī, there is a little preliminary playlet in which the Sūtradhāra continues the introduction of the play. At this stage, he is usually joined by an actress or actor assistant, and through their conversation, the elements hinted at in the Nāndī are developed further. The title of the play and the author's name are traditionally mentioned. Not only in the subject matter of their conversation, but also in their very own persons, the Sūtradhāra and his assistant foreshadow specific characters and situational relationships in the play proper.

Besides the group of genetic elements introduced in the Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra provides in himself a second strand of continuity which stretches from the Nāndī to the Bharatavākyam. His participation in all parts of the play is a thread (*sūtra*) which has been lost sight of during the last thousand years. An occasional commentator or scholar has referred to the 'ancient practice' of a major role in a Sanskrit drama (in the play proper) being played by the Sūtradhāra, himself. The Sūtradhāra and his assistant in Bhavabhūti's play, *Mālatī-Mādhavam*, even tell the audience explicitly that the Sūtradhāra is going to take the hero's part in the play proper. However, we believe

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*This essay is based on a paper presented, on September 17, 1988, in a meeting at the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras, under the auspices of the Institute and the Samskrita Ranga, and published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, Vol. 55 (1988-89), pp. 41-45, and in *The Madras Review of English Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (July 1991), pp. 21-29.

that we are the first to point out the fact that this practice is not occasional, but rather is fundamental to the originally intended organic continuity in all the great classical Sanskrit plays.

To put it boldly, the Sūtradhāra *necessarily* becomes the leading male character in the play proper in *all* of the great classical Sanskrit plays. In his physical person, he carries the strand (*sūtra*) of continuity from the reciting of the opening Nāndī ślōka through the introduction and then through the play proper (in the leading role), and it is he who in the end recites the Bharatavākyam which brings the play to a close.

As a corollary, it follows that the Sūtradhāra's assistant (the Vidūshaka or Naṭī) necessarily is one of the major supporting actors in the play proper. In a sense, the Sūtradhāra and his assistant are 'born again' in the play proper.

The third aspect of continuity in the structure of a classical Sanskrit play follows from the previous two. The Sūtradhāra does not cease to be the Sūtradhāra when he assumes the lead role in the play proper. Strictly speaking, the flesh and blood actor takes the role of the Sūtradhāra, who in turn takes the role of the leading male character in the play proper. The leading male role of a Sanskrit drama is thus a two dimensional character throughout the play proper. Analogously, the Sūtradhāra's assistant is also a two-dimensional character in the play proper.

What we have, then, is a play within a play. The play proper is meta-drama in relation to the drama of the prologue. In one important sense, the introductory playlet does not end with the beginning of the play proper. It only ends when the play proper ends.

In the farce, *Bhagavadajjukam*, written by King Mahēndravarman around the beginning of the seventh century, A.D., the continuity provided by the Sūtradhāra (Director) and the dual personalities of him (Director/Mendicant) and his assistant (Buffoon/Disciple) are clearly evident in the play proper.

In the prologue of this farce, the Director's assistant, the Buffoon, asks him which play he is going to produce. The Director answers that he is going to produce a farce. The Buffoon ironically responds that he doesn't know anything about farcical comedy. The Director then tells him that no one can understand a thing without being taught. The Buffoon (again, ironically) answers that, in that case, it is the Director, himself, who must teach him what a farce is. The Director is only too happy to oblige, and he ushers in the play proper with these words: "Since you are determined to become enlightened, follow me . . . as a disciple follows his guru."

The Director and his assistant make their exit at this point, and after a quick change in costume and make-up, they immediately come back on stage, this time in the leading roles of the Mendicant (guru) and his Disciple. It does not take too much imagination to realize that the whole play proper of *Bhagavadajjukam* is but an extended lesson

taught by the Director to his assistant, who proves to be an excellent, though rebellious, and taunting pupil! It is clear from this that there is here a play within a play. The introductory playlet which involves the Director with the task of teaching his assistant what a farce is does not end until the lesson ends – at the end of the play proper.

Now, there is one particular line (229) toward the end of the play which can only make full sense if we are aware that the same actor is simultaneously both the Vidūṣaka and the Disciple. The "Disciple" says: "Now I've seen the ludicrous taken to the limit! This is Farce!" But we know that it is not merely the Disciple part of his split personality in the meta-drama level saying this. It is, more significantly, the Vidūṣaka part of his personality in the Prologue level drama acknowledging that he has now fully experienced a farcical drama by performing it (the Play Proper) along with the Sūtradhāra.

We have identified here three principles of organic continuity in the structure of the classical Sanskrit drama. The first principle has been much discussed by the old commentators and by modern scholars. The second and third principles, however, which originally must have been so obvious as to need no comment, have, ironically, slipped into the depths of oblivion.

We shall further illustrate the above principles by analyzing the prologues of the two plays, *Chārudattam* and *Mṛicchakaṭikam* (*The Little Clay Cart*). *The Little Clay Cart* has been called the most realistic of classical Indian dramas. In its prologue, the author of the play is identified as King Śūdraka, who died at the age of a hundred years and ten days. Obviously, if King Śūdraka were the author of this play, he could not have written this part of the prologue. To complicate the matter further, this play appears to be a later adaptation of a drama called *Chārudattam*, one of the 'cycle' or collection of thirteen plays discovered by Pandit Ganapati Sastri, who ascribed them all to an early poet, Bhāsa. Ganapati Sastri identified Bhāsa as the author of these plays on the basis of indirect evidence, for there is no mention of any author in the plays themselves.

The Little Clay Cart is complete, and has ten acts. The *Chārudattam* is incomplete, and abruptly breaks off at the end of the fourth act. Whoever it was who wrote the *Chārudattam* had a most inventive mind, and was not in the least afraid of ignoring convention. *The Little Clay Cart*, on the other hand, though more elegantly sophisticated in language, is less unconventional in its structure. An understanding of this difference can be gained by looking at the prologues of the two plays.

Chārudattam

The prologue of *Chārudattam* opens without benefit of a Nāndī ślōka. The absence of the Nāndī is surely not intentional, but rather due to the fragmentary condition of the text.

The author of *Chārudattam* boldly has the Sūtradhāra speaking Prakrit throughout the prologue. This is unique in a Sanskrit play.

The Sūtradhāra enters telling us how hungry he is after long hours of rehearsing. He hopes his wife will have his morning meal ready for him, and as he enters his house, he notes encouraging signs of the preparation of food. This obsession with food is an element which will be embodied by the comedian Maitrēya, in the play proper. The Sūtradhāra's uncertainty about food in his own home anticipates the speech of Maitrēya opening the play proper. Meeting his wife, the Sūtradhāra asks her if there is food for him in the house. His wife, the Actress, describes various delicious dishes. When he, near disbelief, asks her if all this good food is really in his house, she jokingly tells him, 'No, it is available in the market.' In frustrated anger, he calls her '*an-ārya*' ('ignoble'), and curses her to be similarly frustrated in her hopes. The dramatic irony here is that in the role of the '*anārya*' courtesan, Vasantasēnā, in the play proper, the Actress is going to face great frustration before she finally attains her desire of becoming the lawful wife of her lover, the noble and generous merchant, Chārudatta (the role played by her husband, the Sūtradhāra).

To return to the prologue, when the Sūtradhāra gets angry with his actress wife, she tries to calm him down, telling him she was only joking about the food. In fact, all of the good things she described are ready to be eaten. They are, she says, part of a ritual she is performing in order to obtain a noble husband. The Sūtradhāra is quick to ask his wife whether it is in her next birth (*anya-jātyām*) that she is seeking a noble husband. Her answer is 'Yes'. The dramatic irony here is that her Prakrit-speaking husband, the Sūtradhāra, will be 'born again' in the play proper as the hero, Chārudatta. The Actress will be 'born again' as the heroine, the courtesan Vasantasēnā, and she will eventually win the noble (and Sanskrit-speaking) Chārudatta as her husband, a man who, in another sense of the word '*jāti*', belongs to a different caste.

At the 'end' of the prologue, after his wife's exit, the Sūtradhāra is on the lookout for a Brahmin to officiate at the ceremony of his wife's ritual (the metadramatic ceremony which is actually to be the play proper):

> **SŪTRADHĀRA:** Now where can I get a poor Brahmin? (*Looking around*) Ah! Here comes noble Maitrēya, noble Chārudatta's friend. I'll invite him. (*Walking toward him*) Sir, I invite you to take a meal at my home. . . .
>
> (**OFF-STAGE VOICE**) You must invite somebody else. I am not free.

The Sūtradhāra repeats his invitation and exits. He will, later, return on stage in the leading male role of the merchant, Chārudatta.

The Brahmin, Maitrēya, is not free to help the Sūtradhāra in the make-believe world of the prologue because he is to be 'officiating' at the metadramatic 'ceremony' of the play proper (where he is the close companion of Chārudatta). This is a paradox: in not being free to officiate at the prologue level, Maitrēya, does, in fact, officiate at the play proper level. A number of commentators (ancient and not so

ancient) have objected to this intermingling of dramatic worlds. We find it rather intriguing.

The Little Clay Cart

The Little Clay Cart (*Mṛicchakaṭikam*) is an adaptation of the play, *Chārudattam*. But the poet-adapter remains anonymous and he does not claim to be King Śūdraka, the acknowledged author of this play. We suggest that King Śūdraka was the original author of the play, *Chārudattam*, and he was no longer living when the anonymous poet adapted his play in ten complete acts and renamed this adaptation *Mṛicchakaṭikam*. The poet-adapter gives us the information that the original playwright, King Śūdraka, died at the age of one hundred years and ten days – something no original author could declare!

In this adaptation, the Sūtradhāra opens the prologue speaking Sanskrit, and switches to Prakrit when he begins conversing with his wife. Ravenous, he asks if there is anything to eat in the house. His wife, the Actress, describes a variety of dishes. When her husband asks whether this food is really in the house or she is joking, she tells him that it is available in the market. Angry, the Sūtradhāra curses his wife, saying to her, "May your own hopes be dashed, as you have dashed mine." The Actress begs his forgiveness, and says she was only joking. The food is there, and she is performing the ritual for obtaining a handsome husband. The Sūtradhāra asks her whether she seeks such a husband in this world (*lōka*) or the next (*para-lōka*).

ACTRESS: In the next, of course.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Now look at this gentlemen! (*He appeals to the audience*) I have to pay for the food so she will find a noble husband in the next world!

ACTRESS: Please, please, sir! I am doing this so you will be my husband in the next world!

The dramatic irony here, again, is that her husband, the Sūtradhāra, will be 'born again' in the play proper as the hero, Chārudatta. The Actress will be 'born again' as the courtesan, Vasantasēnā. And the two of them will be united in marriage at the end of the play proper. Thus the play proper, itself, is to be viewed as constituting the very ritual the Actress wants to perform in order to obtain a noble husband in the 'next world'.

To recapitulate, then, one of our basic theses has been the insistence on the identity of the person who takes the following roles: the reciter of the opening invocation (the Nāndī), the introducer of the play proper, the hero of the play, and the reciter of the closing benediction (the Bharatavākyam).

The scholarly world, however, seems rather uncertain of these identities. Here is a sample of views regarding the identity of the Sūtradhāra as reciter of the Nāndī and the Sthāpaka as the introducer of the play:

Sten Konow (1901), with reference to the *Karpūra-Mañjarī*:

> . . . the sūtradhāra was not on the stage between the end of the nāndī and that of the prastāvanā.[1]

A.B. Keith (1924):

> . . . another person similar in appearance and qualities to the Sūtradhāra, is to enter and produce the play, a function which gives him the style of introducer, Sthāpaka.[2]

Surendra Nath Shastri (1961):

> After the recitation of the Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra is supposed to get out of the stage and another actor very much resembling him is to enter and introduce the occasion of the enactment of the drama, its title and the author. He is technically called the Establisher (Sthāpaka) or the Introducer.[3]

Harmut-Ortwin Feistel (1972), interpreting the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*:

> After having recited the *prarocanā*, the *sūtradhāra* . . . leaves, and another member of the troupe, imitating the *sūtradhāra's* costume, gait and manners of speech, enters, the so-called *sthāpaka*.[4]

We need not labor the point further. This failure by scholars to recognize the identity of the Sūtradhāra and the Sthāpaka is a result of too literal a reading of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* and the *Daśarūpaka* – and this in spite of Abinavagupta's clear warning:

> *Sūtradhāra ēva sthāpaka iti sūtradhāraḥ pūrvaraṅgaṁ prayujya sthāpakaḥ san praviśēd-iti na bhinna kartṛkatā* |[5]
>
> The Sūtradhāra himself is the Sthāpaka. After performing the preliminaries, the Sūtradhāra should assume the role of the Sthāpaka and appear on the stage. This being the case, don't distinguish them!

H.H. Wilson, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, was on the right track when he suggested:

> It seems not unlikely that it was the intention of the original writers, although the commentators may not have understood it, to discriminate between the real and assumed personage of the Sūtradhāra, who spoke the benediction in his own character or as a Brahman, which he must have been, and then carried on the dialogue of the prelude as the manager of the theatrical corps.[6]

When it comes to the question of the Sūtradhāra/Sthāpaka taking a role in the play proper, there is recognition among some scholars that he may often take some role:

M. Winternitz (1909-20):

> The sūtradhāra was generally the main actor, who played the chief rôle, that is the hero.[7]

Surendra Nath Shastri (1961):

> [The sūtradhāra] is the actor-in-chief, and assumes the rôle of some character in the play.[8]

H.W. Wells (1963):

> The producer at times evolves into a character of the play.[9]

V. Raghavan (1966):

> . . . on the ancient Sanskrit stage, there was the practice of the character or characters of the opening scene of the play figuring in the *prastāvanā*, as the *Sūtradhāra* and the *Naṭa*.[10]

I. Shekhar (1977):

> Since the Sūtradhāra managed the entire show . . . , he had to take any role when an artist was missing or the troupe wanted to economise.[11]

All of these are qualified statements using such terms as ‘generally’, ‘some’, ‘at times’, etc. Shekhar would have the Sūtradhāra’s choice of role depend on filling in for someone missing or on matters of economy.

In contrast, our view is that the prologue of a Sanskrit drama is carefully crafted by the playwright so that by aesthetic design the Sūtradhāra must take a specific leading role, and his assistant must assume the role of a specific character in the play proper – not just *some* role.

If we may be allowed to adapt Abhinavagupta’s dictum:

> *Sthāpaka ēva pradhāna-pātra iti sthāpakaḥ prastāvanāṁ prayujya pradhāna-pātras-san praviśēd-iti na bhinna kartṛkatā* |[12]

> The Sthāpaka himself is the main character. After performing the Prastāvanā, the Sthāpaka should assume the role of the main character and appear on the stage. This being the case, don’t distinguish them!

From its beginning to its end, the Sanskrit play, thus, reveals an unfolding continuity and unity in its structural development which commentators have perceptively compared with the development of a living organism.

Notes

1. Sten Konow (ed.), *Rāja-çekhara's* Karpūra-Mañjarī, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1901), p. 196.
2. A.B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development & Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 340.
3. Surendra Nath Shastri, *The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit Drama*, Vol. 2 (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1961), p. 42.
4. Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel, "The Pūrvaraṅga and the Chronology of Pre-classical Sanskrit Theatre", *Saṁskṛita Raṅga Annual*, Vol. 6, 1972, p. 13.
5. Bharata's *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, with the commentary, *Abhinavabhāratī*, by Abhinavagupta, Vol. 1, *Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. 36*, second edition, revised and critically edited by K.S. Ramaswami Sastri (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1956), p. 248 (see the commentary on *ślōkas* 162 & 163).
6. H.H. Wilson (tr.), *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus*, 3rd ed., Vol. 1 (London: Trübner & Co., 1871 [1st ed., 3 vols., 1826-27]), p. xxxv.
7. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 3, Part 1, of Subhadra Jha's translation in English (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963 [1909-20]), p. 189.
8. Surendra Nath Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 31, n. 1.
9. H.W. Wells, *The Classical Drama of India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 113.
10. V. Raghavan, "Kūḍiyāṭṭam – Its Form and Significance as Sanskrit Drama", *The Saṁskṛita Raṅga Annual*, Vol. 5, 1964-1967, p. 84.
11. I. Shekhar, *Sanskrit Drama: Its Origin and Decline*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manorharlal Publishers, 1977), pp. 86-87.
12. This is our own adaptation of Abhinavagupta's dictum quoted earlier.

2

Nāṭya-Yajña (Drama as Sacrifice)*

Classical Indian writers considered the Nāṭaka to be the greatest form of literary achievement. The popular notion in the past was, 'mastery in dramaturgy is the final end of poetic genius': '*Nāṭakāntaṁ kavitvam*' – a statement which derives its significance from Bharata's view of the Nāṭaka as that which represents the evolutionary 'march of the three worlds': '*Trailōkyasyāsya sarvasya nāṭyaṁ bhāvānukīrtanam*.'[1] The demand on the dramatist was great. He had the difficult task of revealing creation itself within the limited frame of his plot; he had necessarily to place himself in the center of this apparently limited plot and look at the entire universe from different angles, through different eyes and minds, and thus provide a pen picture of the perennial flux of creation to his spectators.

Besides regarding the Nāṭaka as a work representing the march of the three worlds, Bharata also speaks of it as a sacrifice.[2] The force of his argument in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* shows that the two are in fact inseparable from each other. The march of the three worlds is at the same time a sacrificial ritual. This idea seems to go back for its support to the Puruṣa Sūkta of the *Ṛg-Vēda*, in which the creation of cosmic life is described in terms of a sacrifice. The Puruṣa-Sūkta describes, first, the voluntary self-sacrifice of the Impersonal Absolute (Puruṣa), which lays the foundation of creation. The voluntary self-sacrifice of the Puruṣa results in the emergence of the Cosmos, technically called Virāt. Out of Virāt there comes into being the Cosmic Person – the first born, the first Creator. Next, the gods appear. They perform a sacrifice in which the Cosmic Person is the oblation. From that sacrifice, in which is invoked the all-inclusive Supreme Person, come out all the constituent parts of the Cosmos.[3]

Sāyaṇa, in his commentary on the Ṛg-Vēda, interprets this sacrifice as a mental sacrifice ('*mānasa-yajña*'), one which is performed within a Vēdāntic frame of mind.[4] It is, perhaps, for this reason that Abhinavagupta, in his commentaries on the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* and *Dhvanyālōka* notes the isomorphism of aesthetic problems to those of the philosopher whose concept of sacrifice is of something mental and philosophical in nature.[5]

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*This essay is based on a paper presented, on October 4, 1989, at the National Symposium on Perspectives in Indian Philosophy, held at the University of Madras on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, and published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, Vol. 56 (1989-90), pp. 17-21.

It seems evident to us that Bharata was influenced by the sacrifice described in the Puruṣa Sūkta because in it the sacrifice and the march of the three worlds seem to be identified with each other.

The view expressed by Bharata in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* is echoed by Kālidāsa, in his play, *Mālavikāgnimitram*, and by King Mahēndra, in his farce, the *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam*. Kālidāsa writes:

Dēvānām-idam-āmananti munayaḥ kāntaṁ kratuṁ cākṣuṣaṁ
Rudrēṇēdam-umā-kṛta-vyatikarē svāṅgē vibhaktaṁ dvidhā |
Traiguṇyōdbhavam-atra lōka-caritaṁ nānā-rasaṁ dṛśyatē
Nāṭyaṁ bhinna-rucēr-janasya bahudhāpy-ēkaṁ samārādhanam ||[6]

Nāṭya is said by the sages to be a sacrifice which affords visual delight (even) to the gods. It is divided by Rudra into two parts in his own body which is united with that of Umā.
In it are seen the ways of the world, which evolve from the three-fold division of nature (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*), in the form of various Rasas. It is one great, sumptuous feast to the people of varied taste.

This descriptive passage is a panegyric on the great merits of Nāṭya, its association with the gods, and its utility as the foremost source and form of recreation for people of varied tastes. Implied in this passage is the idea that Nāṭya can bring about emotional integration among people of diverse tastes.

In the cultural history of classical India, every human activity was thought to have had, along with its secular purpose, a religious purpose, too. All śāstras and lore were inseparably connected with the final goal of man. Similarly, Nāṭya also had a religious element in it. It is a form of paying homage to the manifold roles of the architect of the universe.

Bharata says that Brahmā created a fifth Vēda entitled 'Nāṭya' for the benefit of all classes of people. For the composition of his work, Brahmā took Pāṭhya (which Abhinavagupta interprets as Vācika) from the *Ṛg-Vēda*, Gītā from the *Sāma-Vēda*, Abhinayas from the *Yajur-Vēda*, and Rasas from the *Atharva-Vēda*:

Jagrāha pāṭhyam ṛg-vēdāt-sāmabhyō gītam-ēva ca |
Yajur-vēdād-abhinayān rasān-ātharvaṇād-api ||[7]

In order to make Nāṭya comprehensive, Bharata adapted music, archery, medicine, etc., from the Upa-Vēdas. The final product was not only comprehensive but also playful (*lalita*). Further, it contained in itself the essence of all śāstras, and served to promote the cause of all fine arts:

Sarva-śāstrārtha-sampannaṁ sarva-śilpa-pravartakam |[8]

Abhinavagupta's perceptive commentary on the Vēdic ingredients borrowed by Brahmā would show that they are connected with sacrifice and thus would justify Bharata's contention that Nāṭya is essentially a sacrifice.[9]

It is interesting to note that the Bīja-Vinyāsa (the presentation or offering of the seed) performed by the Sūtradhāra at the introductory stage by reciting the Nāndī of a classical Sanskrit play seems to parallel the sacrificial offering of the gods mentioned above. Once the gods had offered the Puruṣa as the main oblation, they could perceive the slow unfolding of the cosmic structure as their sacrifice proceeded. Analogously, from the time the Sūtradhāra presents the Bīja in the Nāndī, the Nāṭaka can be said slowly to unfold the structure of its microcosmic world.

To go back to Kālidāsa's ślōka, the implications of its second line seem to be even more significant than the first. It associates Nāṭya with the god Śiva, the primordial Dancer. As Ardhanārīśvara, the dual manifestation of the god (a single body with its left side being female and its right side male) represents not only the two-fold aspect of Śiva's dance, the rough, violent, fearful form of dancing, and the graceful form, but also the aspect of cosmic creation, the eternal activity of the androgynous figure. *Sṛṣṭi* (creation) is thus a perennial flow in the form of the dance of Śiva. To this effect, Mahēndravarman, in the Nāndī of his farce, *Mattavilāsam*, says:

Bhāṣā-vēṣa-vapuḥ-kriyā-guṇa-kṛtān-āśritya bhēdān gataṁ
Bhāvāvēśa-vaśād-anēka-rasatāṁ trailōkya-yātrā-mayam |
Nṛttaṁ niṣprati-baddha-bōdha-mahimā yaḥ prēkṣakaś-ca svayaṁ
Sa vyāptāvani-bhājanaṁ diśatu vō divyaḥ kapālī yaśaḥ ||[10]

Through the different modes of speech, dress,
bodily action, and expression of nature,
The representation of various emotions brought on by the
arousal of the power of primal feelings,
May that resplendent Kapālī of unopposed, omniscient supremacy,
who's the performer and spectator Himself of His own dance,
The manifold march of evolution of the three worlds,
grant you His world-bowl-filling glory!

In fact, the entire play, *Mattavilāsam*, is suggestively illustrative of the eternal flux (*Sṛṣṭi*).

The microcosmic world created by the dramatist within the frame of his Nāṭaka includes: (i) the semi-dramatic world (technically called the Pūrvaraṅga) constituted by the preliminary musical warm-up, performance, and dance, followed by the Nāndī and Prastāvanā, and (ii) the fully dramatic world of the main body of the play. The audience thus passes from the world of everyday reality, with its religious and social aspects, to the dramatic world of the play proper. The play performance achieves this transition with (a) the introduction of music and dance, (b) the aspect of prayer in the Nāndī, and (c) the hinting, within the Nāndī, at the latent seed of the plot in the suggestive speeches of the Sūtradhāra and his Assistant which indicate some of the key incidents in the main body of the play.

As we have pointed out in the earlier essay, the Nāndī ślōka of a classical Sanskrit play is like an embryo.[11] It contains within itself genetic elements of the play. These elements, in the form of suggestive meanings, are difficult to make out at a first reading or hearing, but as the play proceeds, it becomes possible to grasp their meaning retroactively. In the context of our discussion of 'drama as sacrifice', the Nāndī ślōka, together with its surface level of meaning, forms a unity analogous to the Cosmic Person. From the sacrifice (dismemberment) of this unity come out all the constituent parts of the Cosmos (the microcosm of the Nāṭaka). In other words, out of the unity of the surface level meaning of the Nāndī come the many different levels of suggested meaning which evolve throughout the whole drama.

We also maintained that the Sūtradhāra provides in himself a second strand of continuity which stretches from the Nāndī to the final benedictory stanza of the play, the Bharatavākyam. We agreed with Abhinavagupta that it is wrong to distinguish the Sūtradhāra who recites the Nāndī and the Sthāpaka (or Introducer). They are an identity. Bharata and Danañjaya merely distinguish this identity's different roles. We went further, however, to say that the Sūtradhāra/ Sthāpaka should not be distinguished from the leading character of the play proper. The Sūtradhāra merely takes on the role of the leading character. Similarly, his assistant assumes the role of a particular character in the play proper. As we put it, the Sūtradhāra and his assistant are 'born again' in the play proper. This unity underlying diversity parallels the Divine Drama of the 'real' world. God, as the Cosmic Person, is the Divine creation. He calls into being His *alter ego*. And from the resulting duality come the many. This idea has been expressed elegantly by the ancient poet, Bhartṛhari:

Tam-asya lōka-yantrasya sūtradhāraṁ pracakṣatē |
Pratibandhābhy-anujñābhyāṁ tēna viśvaṁ vibhajyatē ||[12]

It is said, He is the Sūtradhāra of, and *is* Himself, this Lōka-yantra (perpetual motion machine – the Universe).

He, in the form of the Cosmos, divides Himself through disintegration (into the many) and re-integration (of the many, while remaining One).

The third aspect of continuity in the structure of a classical Sanskrit play, we suggested, logically follows from the previous two. The play proper is meta-drama in relation to the drama of the Prastāvanā or Prologue. What we have, then, in every classical Sanskrit drama, is a play within a play. The concept of 'plays-within-plays' and that of 'roles-within-roles' illustrate how the Sūtradhāra in Sanskrit drama, like the Divine Sūtradhāra, divides himself into 'many' and re-integrates the many, while remaining 'one'.

Certain interesting deductions can be made from our theory, and we shall, therefore, examine the play, *Chārudattam*, whose authorship has been the subject of much controversy ever since

T. Ganapati Sastri ascribed it to Bhāsa. The play is fragmentary, with only four acts. Its Nāndī seems to have disappeared from its proper place long ago. It will be worthwhile to consider, here, A.D. Pusalker's comment that:

> Krishnamoorthy has invited attention to a stanza in Prakrit quoted in the *Kāvyaprakāśa*, which has been ascribed to Bhāsa by Sāyana in his *Alaṁkāra-sudhānidhi*.[13]

Pusalker, further, reports that, according to K. Krishnamoorthy, this stanza looks like a maṅgala-ślōka and that, on the basis of this, Krishnamoorthy says that Bhāsa must have written a Prakrit poetic work of which this stanza is the maṅgala-ślōka.[14]

The Prastāvanā of the play, *Chārudattam*, is entirely in Prakrit. As the *Chārudattam* is a Sanskrit play, its Sūtradhāra speaking only Prakrit is unique, indeed. Working backwards from the Prastāvanā of the Chārudatta, our theory would expect a Nāndī in Prakrit – not in Sanskrit! Surprisingly, Krishnamoorthy had within his grasp the missing Nāndī of the play, *Chārudattam*, but neither he nor anyone else so far has recognized it as such! Our identification is based not merely on the fact of the Prastāvanā's being in Prakrit, but also, most importantly, on the implications of the Nāndī ślōka which have a bearing on the play, *Chārudattam*. We, therefore, make a brief analysis of this ślōka and examine its implications. The ślōka reads:

Yā sthaviram-iva hasantī kavi- vadanāmburuha- baddha- vinivēśā
Jā ṭhēraṁ 'va hasantī ka'i va'aṇaṁburuha-baddha-viṇivēsā |

Darśayati bhuvana- maṇḍalam- anyad- iva jayati sā vāṇī
Dāvē'i bhu'aṇa-maṇḍalam-aṇṇam vi'a ja'a'i sā vāṇī ||[15]

Enthroned on the lotus-face of the poet, her elderly Lord,
and as though laughing at him,

Vānī, the Goddess of Speech, triumphs
by revealing his whole world as different, transformed!

Here, the Goddess of Speech is represented as mischievously laughing/smiling at her husband, Brahmā, who is popularly known in the Purāṇas as Pitāmaha (Grandfather). The elderly Brahmā is indicated by the word '*sthavira*' in the ślōka. Further, the Goddess, functioning as the voice of the primal poet (Brahmā, the Purāṇa-Kavi), smiles/laughs from there, and triumphs by revealing the world being created by her husband to be quite different from what he might have expected. Note: she achieves this triumph through *dhvani*!

Going by our theory, we note that the Sūtradhāra of the *Chārudattam*, has a strong resemblance to the 'Sthavira' being teased by the Goddess of Speech. Like the Brahmā of the maṅgala-ślōka, the Sūtradhāra of the play is markedly older than his wife. Further, the wife of the Sūtradhāra of this play appears to be a replica of the mischievous Goddess of Speech in so far as she too is adept at pulling

her husband's leg. Her hungry husband comes back home with the hope of getting his morning meal. The smell from the kitchen and other signs make him feel that the whole world is full of nothing but food. When, however, he asks his wife whether there is food, she tells him that there is plenty of food, but it is in the market! The Sūtradhāra's world of food is now transformed into a world of nothingness. Like the Goddess of Speech, the wife of the Sūtradhāra, through *dhvani*, also transforms the world created in her husband's imagination. And, again like the Goddess, she also smiles and laughs mischievously because she has triumphed by pleasantly teasing her husband. (Though he doesn't take it so pleasantly.) This humorous aspect of the transformation of the world in the Prologue is echoed by Maitrēya's opening speech of the Play Proper, where he describes how his world of good food in plenty at Chārudatta's home has been transformed into one of famine.

There is one final idea, the implication of which runs through the Nāndī, the Prastāvanā, and the Play Proper of *Chārudattam*. It is an idea which arose in our thinking in response to a question put to us by one of our students – a woman student: Is there ever a Sūtradhārī (a female Sūtradhāra) in classical Sanskrit drama? It may seem surprising, but the answer to her question is 'yes'! In this play, *Chārudattam* (and its adapted, complete version, *Mṛicchakaṭikam*), the Naṭī of the Prologue should really be viewed as a Sūtradhārī. Between the two – the Naṭī and her husband (the Sūtradhāra) – it is the wife who actually takes the lead. Further, in the Play Proper, it is the Courtesan, Vasantasēnā, who has the leading role – not Chārudatta. In the *Mṛicchakaṭikam*, these two ideas are explicitly revealed by the character, Śakāra, in the prose passage immediately preceding ślōka 51, First Act, where he refers to Vasantasēnā as "this female stage-director [*sūtradhārī*] directing an unprecedented, new play"!

In the maṅgala-ślōka, which we have identified as the missing Nāndī of the *Chārudattam*, it is obvious that the Goddess of Speech takes the lead in relation to her lord, Brahmā. Thus, Vasantasēnā's leading role in the Play Proper is evolved metadramatically from the Naṭī's dominant role in the Prastāvanā. And, in turn, the Naṭī's role is evolved metadramatically from the Goddess's dominance in the maṅgala/Nāndī ślōka.

Notes

1. *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, ed. R.S. Nagar, Vol. 1 (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1988), p. 34.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
3. Ṛg-Vēda, x:90.6, x:90.7, and x:90.16.
4. Sāyaṇa, *Rig-Veda-Saṁhita*, Vol. 6, ed. F. Max Muller (London: Allen & Co., 1874), p. 246.
5. Abhinavagupta, *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, pp. 5-6, 13-14, 271-284, and *Dhvanyālōka*, ed. Durgaprasad (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1935), pp. 82-85.
6. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, ed. C.R. Devadhar (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 9, 10.
7. *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, ed. Durgaprasad, p. 13.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
9. *Abhinavabhāratī*, *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, pp. 13-14.
10. The full text and translation of this play are given in Part II of this book.
11. "Sanskrit Drama – Its Continuity of Structure".
12. Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīyam*, Trivandrum Series 116, edited by K. Sambasiva Sastri (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1935), p. 51 (Kālasamuddēsa: 4th ślōka).
13. A.D. Pusalker, *Bhāsa – A Study* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968 [1940]), p. 507.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Mammaṭa, *Kāvyaprakāśa*, Vol. 1 (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1985), p. 166.

Addendum 2005

In this second edition of our book, we now hold, as we have held with other classical Sanskrit dramas, that the Sūtradhāra in the *Chārudattam* (as well as in its adaptation, the *Mṛicchakaṭikam*) assumes the role of the hero in the Play Proper. In both of these dramas, the Sūtradhāra assumes the role of the noble merchant, Chārudatta.

The *Chārudattam* is a Sanskrit play, but the Sūtradhāra speaks only Prakrit (not Sanskrit) *throughout* its Prologue. His doing so would have been very surprising, if not shocking, to the earliest audiences. The *Chārudattam* is the *only* classical Sanskrit play where the Prologue is conducted entirely in Prakrit.

We understand from the Sūtradhāra's speech that he and his household have been reduced to abject poverty. It seems to us, that in order to further emphasize this impoverishment, the playwright has chosen to have the Sūtradhāra speak only the common vernacular, Prakrit.

The purpose of his wife's ritual is to bring about his becoming her husband (and a 'handsome' one at that) in their next rebirths. Their rebirths are to be metadramatically realized in the forthcoming Play Proper. The Sūtradhāra is 'reborn' as Chārudatta, and his wife, the Naṭī, is 'reborn' as the courtesan, Vasantasēnā. At the end of the play, as seen in the *Mṛicchakaṭikam*, Vasantasēnā becomes Chārudatta's second, younger (legal) wife. The Naṭī *also* plays the part of Chārudatta's Brahmin wife and therefore she manages to be (theatrically) reborn as both his wives! The passage in the *Mṛicchakaṭikam*, toward the end of the last act in some of the extant texts, which has Chārudatta's Brahmin wife on stage embracing (!) Vasantasēnā, is a brazen interpolation actually signed and acknowledged as such by the offending interpolator! (Cf. R.P. Oliver, *Mṛcchakaṭikā – The Little Clay Cart* [Urbana: U. of Illinois, 1938], pp. 206-7, n. 68.) At no time in the original *Mṛicchakaṭikam* (or *Chārudattam*) do Chārudatta's Brahmin wife and Vasantasēnā appear on stage at the same time!

The ritual initiated by the Sūtradhāra's wife (her 'Fast for a Handsome Husband') should therefore be viewed as creating a kind of magical spell that transforms her husband into the handsome, noble – but still poor – hero, Chārudatta, who now recites glorious Sanskrit prose and poetry! The less noble elements of the Sūtradhāra's character (including his speaking only Prakrit) are incarnated in the Vidūṣaka, named Maitrēya, the companion of Chārudatta.

Like the Divine Sūtradhāra who, in the form of the Cosmos, divides Himself into the Many, the character of the Sūtradhāra of both plays, *Chārudattam* and *Mṛicchakaṭikam*, splits into the two roles of Chārudatta and Maitrēya, played by himself and another actor in the metadramatic world of the Play Proper. The Naṭi (the Sūtradhārī of both plays) will, herself, be taking *both* the roles of Chārudatta's Brahmin wife and of his Courtesan lover.

In declining the invitation to officiate at the ritual fast of the Sūtradhāra's wife, saying he is not free, Maitrēya, paradoxically, can be viewed as doing just what he says he can't do, since the Naṭī's ritual is really the production of the Play Proper. Maitrēya declines entering the dramatic world of the Prologue because he is a character already existing in the metadramatic world – the world in which he will be the 'officiating' Brahmin for the metadramatic characters of Chārudatta, his wife, and his second love, Vasantasēnā.

At the end of the Third Act, when Chārudatta's wife hears that the jewels of Vasantasēnā which had been left in the safekeeping of her husband have been stolen, she wishes to offer her own family heirloom, a very valuable pearl necklace, as a replacement for the stolen jewels. However, as Chārudatta, in his impoverished state, would certainly feel too embarrassed to accept, directly from his wife, her necklace as substitute for the Courtesan's jewels, she thinks up a scheme of indirectly getting him to accept the necklace. She tells her maid, Radanikā, to bring Maitrēya to her. She then asks Maitrēya to accept, as a ritual gift from her, the necklace, which is her most valuable possession. She explains to him that she has been carrying out a fast in order to obtain the blessing of a Brahmin, and she wants Maitrēya to be that Brahmin. Maitrēya, surprised by the great value of the gift, tells her that he hopes she is telling the truth about her ritual, as otherwise Chārudatta might discover the deception and curse her. (This curse would, in the event, be a meta-curse.) Maitrēya plays along with her little fiction, and, as instructed by Radanikā, he hands over the necklace to Chārudatta. Chārudatta does accept the necklace, though he feels cursed *himself* in his poverty, and declares that by his wife thus rescuing his honor, he has been turned into a woman, and she has become the man!

3

The Victorianization of *Śākuntala**

'Fondling', she saith, 'since I have hemm'd thee here
Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:
Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie',

– W.S.

The above, metaphorical passage from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is relatively easy for the reader to interpret. Kālidāsa, however, is not so explicit in the ślōka recited by the Sūtradhāra, early in the prologue of his play, *Śākuntala*; and its dhvani has, generally, not been grasped:

Subhaga-salilāvagāhāḥ pāṭala-saṁsargi-surabhi-vana-vātāḥ |
Pracchāya sulabha-nidrā divasāḥ pariṇāma-ramaṇīyāḥ ||3||

The full śṛṅgāric dimensions of this passage, as well as of the whole prologue together with the Nāndī ślōka, appear to have been lost sight of a long time ago, for Sanskrit commentators do not discuss them. Neither have W.T. Jones and later translators noted the pungent suggestiveness in the passages leading up to the play proper. The śṛṅgāra rasa is dominant in this play, and many are the words throughout the prologue which are charged with dramatic irony, resonating in powerful parallelism with later erotic passages in the play proper.

Consider the opening stanza, the Nāndī ślōka:

Yā sṛṣṭiḥ sraṣṭur-ādyā vahati vidhihutaṁ yā havir-yā ca hōtrī
Yē dvē kālaṁ vidhattaḥ śruti-viṣaya-guṇā yā sthitā vyāpya viśvam |
Yām-āhuḥ sarva-bīja-prakṛtir-iti yayā prāṇinaḥ prāṇavantaḥ
Pratyakṣābhiḥ prapannas-tanubhir-avatu vas-tābhir-aṣṭābhir-īśaḥ ||

The most potent idea introduced here is that of 'Sacrifice'. And there are two important levels of suggestiveness. First, there is the Sacrifice dealt with in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the *Ṛg-Vēda*: Cosmic Creation. Second, there is also the 'sacrifice' of the sexual act: Pro-creation – also dealt with in the *Ṛg-Vēda*, as well as in later works.

The Nāndī begins with a reference to that which is the first, the foremost creation of the Creator ('*Yā sṛṣṭiḥ sraṣṭur-ādyā . . .*') – a

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*This essay is based on a paper published in *Kavya Bharati*, No. 4 (1992), pp. 84-99.

clause which suggests the Waters (the Female) at the cosmic level and Śakuntalā, the daughter of an Apsarā, at the erotic-procreative level in this play. Next, there is a reference to that which conveys the oblation according to rules ('. . . *vahati vidhihutam yā havir* . . .') – a clause which suggests Fire (the Male) at the cosmic level, and Duṣyanta, the conveyor of the oblation (semen), at the erotic-procreative level in the play.

The Waters and the Fire, together, constitute the fundamental creative force in the cosmos, and these two elements were visualized by the *Ṛg-Vēdic* seer as forming a *mithuna* (sex pair).[1] The principle of Fire at three different levels – heaven, mid-region, and the earth – was the Male; and the Waters, at these three levels, were the Female. Further, these two principles were visualized as uniting at each of these three levels. The result was the fructification of the Female at all three levels.

The first two clauses of the Nāndī of the *Śākuntala* are, therefore, suggestive of the *Ṛg-Vēdic* idea of the union between the 'Waters' and the 'Fire', as well as of the sacrificial aspect of sexual 'union' spoken of in the Brāhmaṇa texts.

Fulfilling the recommendation made in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* that the Nāndī should hint at the characters in the play proper, we have noted that these two clauses allude to Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, implicitly identified, respectively, with the Waters and the Fire – the two eternal creative principles.

In the second clause, which alludes to King Duṣyanta, the word '*vidhihutam*' ('according to rule or law') has at this implied level of meaning a satirical, ironic edge to it, for the king, in Act Three, is going to try to justify his impetuous attempt to seduce Śakuntalā by appealing to 'the Law'! When the king catches hold of Śakuntalā's garment, she warns him, asking him to behave himself – there are ascetics wandering around. But the king replies:

> *Bhīru alaṁ guru-jana-bhayēna* । *Dṛṣṭvā tē viditadharmā tatra-bhavān-na tatra dōṣaṁ grahīṣyati kulapatiḥ* । *Api ca,*
>
> *Gandharvēṇa vivāhēna bahvyō rājarṣi-kanyakāḥ* ।
> *Śrūyantē pariṇītās-tāḥ pitṛbhiś-cābhi-nanditāḥ* ॥
>
> Timid girl, enough of your fear of elders! When he learns of what you have done, His Holiness [Kaṇva], a great teacher who knows the truth of the Law, will not find fault with you. For,
>
> Many daughters of royal sages
> were wed according to Gāndharva rites
> And, one hears, joyfully
> accepted by their fathers.

But after mouthing these brave words, King Duṣyanta, finding himself out in the open light, lets go of Śakuntalā and beats a retreat into the shady cover of the forest!

We have seen, thus, how various phrases in the Nāndī ślōka can be understood to suggest certain characters and situations in the play proper (and, of course, in the prologue, too).

But some modern scholars have had reservations about this mode of interpretation:

Monier Williams (in 1876) speaks thus about what one of the 'ancient' commentators had to say concerning the Nāndī of the Śākuntala:

> Śaṅkara, with far-fetched subtilty, points out how each of these types of Śiva [i.e., forms of Śiva] is intended by the poet to correspond with circumstances in the life of Śakuntalā.[2]

C.R. Devadhar (1934) warns that the Nāndī's

> characteristic of suggesting the story of the drama has led commentators into ingenious attempts to find out fantastic allusions to the main elements or incidents of the drama.[3]

Unfortunately, failure to seek out the allusions suggested by elements in the Nāndī ślōka and in the prologue reduces one to the level of the more naive members of the audience (or readers) of these inherently sophisticated works of art.

According to us, the Sūtradhāra and the Naṭī are to be 'born again' in the play proper as the hero and heroine, and thus their conversation in the prologue foreshadows their intense passion in the play proper. With this metadramatic relationship kept in mind, let us examine the *dhvani* in the prologue in some detail.

Immediately following the Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra's opening speech, to his 'wife', the Naṭī ('*Āryē! Yadi nēpathya-vidhānam-avasitam, itas-tāvad-āgamyatām*' – 'Lady, if you have finished dressing, please come here'), strikes an ancient śṛṅgāric note intertwined with itself (Speech):

Uta tvaḥ paśyan na dadarśa vācaṁ
Uta tvaḥ śṛṇvan na śṛṇōtyēnam |
Utō tvasmi tanvaṁ visasrē jyāyēva
Patyā uśatī suvāsaḥ ||

Ṛg-Vēda, X:71.4

> One [man], indeed, beholding Speech has not seen her; another hearing her has not heard her; but to another
> She delivers her person in the same way a passionate wife, beautifully attired, gives herself to her husband.

The Naṭī enters, and the Sūtradhāra tells her that they are going to put on a new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam', by Kālidāsa, so let every actor be well prepared.

The Naṭī replies:

Suvihita- prayōgatayāryasya na kim-api parihāsyatē
Suvihida-ppa'ō'adā'ē ajjassa ṇa kiṁ 'vi parihāsyatē |

Because of your masterly 'performance', sir, nothing will appear ridiculous.

At one level of meaning – the obvious one – the Naṭī is praising the 'expert directorial skills' (*suvihita-prayōga*) of the Sūtradhāra. But the Naṭī (whose *alter ego* is Śakuntalā) is, through the same expression, also playfully praising the skills in the art of love-making possessed by the Sūtradhāra (whose *alter ego* is Duṣyanta). We are to witness the 'dressed'-rehearsal of his skills in love-making toward the end of Act Three.

The Sūtradhāra's response continues the double level of meaning established by the Naṭī:

Āryē! Kathayāmi tē bhūtārtham,

Ā paritōṣād-viduṣāṁ na sādhu manyē prayōga-vijñānam |
Balavad-api śikṣitānām-ātmany-apratyayaṁ cētaḥ ||2||

Dear, to tell you the truth,

Unless the learnèd ones are completely satisfied,
A performance cannot be considered good.
For, however expert one may be,
There still lurks in the mind a sense of diffidence. (2)

At the surface level, the Sūtradhāra is modestly deferring to the learnèd members of the audience the judgment of his directorial skills. At the implied level of meaning, however, he is expressing diffidence about his love-making skills, which are soon to be tested in his role of King Duṣyanta. And the 'learnèd ones' who must be completely satisfied at this level are those members of the audience who are well versed in the *Kāma-Sūtra*!

The Naṭī then wants to know what should be done next, and the Sūtradhāra asks her to entertain the audience by singing a song about the summer season which has just commenced,

When plunging deep into water's a pleasure,
When the trumpet flower adds to the fragrance of the forest breeze,
When deep-shade induced sleep
At the end of a playful day is heavenly. (3)

This stanza recited by the Sūtradhāra, which obviously praises the pleasures of nature in early summer, has also a frankly sexual level

of implied meaning. The element '*bhaga*' in the word '*subhaga*' is suggestive, especially when modifying the expression 'plunging deep into water' (*salilāvagāhaḥ*). The trumpet flower (*pāṭala*) has its own sexual connotation. Again, the passage, 'deep-shade induced sleep at at the end of a playful day', has a resonance with the love 'episode' toward the end of Act Three.

The Naṭī then sings a song:

Īṣad-īśac-cumbitāni bhramaraiḥ sukumāra- kēsara- śikhāni
Īsīsi- cuṁbi'ā'iṁ bhamarēhiṁ su'umāra-kēsara-śihā'iṁ |

Avataṁsayanti dayamānāḥ pramadāś- śirīṣa- kusumāni
Ōdaṁsayaṁti da'amāṇā pamadā'ō-sirīsa-kusumā'iṁ ||4||

Softly, softly bees kiss
The filament's tender crest
Of the śirīṣa flower
Adorning gentle, sensuous women. (4)

This verse, at its surface level of meaning, speaks of bees, and of śirīṣa flowers adorning women – conventionally understood as adorning their ears.

Barbara S. Miller, in her essay introducing the plays of Kālidāsa, has this to say about the effect of the Naṭī's song:

> In the prologue of the *Śākuntala*, the director and the audience are so enchanted by the actress's song of summer that they are transported beyond mundane concerns. On awakening, the director recognizes its effect:
>
> The mood of your song's melody
> carried me off by force,
> just as the swift dark antelope
> enchanted King Duṣyanta.[4]

Miller's observation on the effect of the actress's song ('being transported beyond mundane concerns') appears to put the emphasis on some transcendent aspect of the beauty of nature. But it is not just the birds and bees which are carrying away the Sūtradhāra/Duṣyanta and the learnèd audience. It is, in large measure, the strong current of eroticism which runs through the prologue which has this effect.

One level of implied meaning in the Naṭī's song is easily understood: the bee represents a passionate human lover kissing gently his belovèd. But what exactly does the parallel suggest? Is the lover kissing her lips? Her ear? Or the flower decorating her ear? (Despite this seeming indefiniteness, the dramatic irony here clearly hints at the episode in the first act, where Śakuntalā [the Naṭī] wearing

a flower on her ear, is pestered by a bee, and the king [the Sūtradhāra] reveals himself and comes to her rescue – and at other episodes, such as Queen Hamsavatī's song at the beginning of Act Five.)

As it is the Naṭī who first injects sexual suggestiveness into their conversation, and as the Sūtradhāra then raises this suggestiveness to a pitch in Verse 3, we feel that it is not just the above mentioned two levels of meaning in the Naṭī's song which has the effect of transfixing the mind of the Sūtradhāra, and of everyone else in Kālidāsa's theater.

The basic image of a śirīṣa flower tucked above the ear as an adornment of women has various sexually suggestive elements in it: the orifice of the ear, the flower metaphor, and the detail of its filament's tender crest (at the top of the 'ear'). The Naṭī's bee, thus, seems to be well acquainted with an advanced technique of the *Kāma-Sūtra*.

This multi-layered expression of erotic passion is then condensed into the word '*rāga*' used by the Sūtradhāra:

Ahō! Rāga baddha-citta-vṛttir-ālikhita iva sarvatō raṅgaḥ |

Ah, your passion/melody has transfixed the mind, the whole body of this theater is motionless, as in a painting!

The *dhvani* condensed in the single word '*rāga*', here, is amplified and expressed in two words, '*gīta-rāgēṇa*', in the verse of the Sūtradhāra's following line:

Tavāsmi gīta-rāgēṇa hāriṇā prasabhaṁ hṛtaḥ |
Ēṣa rājēva duṣyantaḥ sāraṅgēṇātiraṁhasā ||5||

I have been carried away by the haunting passionate melody of your song,
As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

In this verse, the Sūtradhāra explains his absentmindedness – his forgetting that he is putting on the play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'. This forgetfulness, of course, foreshadows the curse's effect in his role of Duṣyanta.

What we wish to analyze, now, are the tenses (of verbs) used in three recent translations of the last two lines of the prologue:

Michael Coulson's (1981):

ACTRESS But you've already announced that we're to do a new play called 'Śakuntalā and the Love Token'!

DIRECTOR My goodness, so I had. For the moment I'd quite forgotten. In fact

I was as swept away
By the enchantment of your song
As King Dushyanta here
Drawn on and on by the swift-fleeing deer.[5]

Barbara S. Miller's (1984):

ACTRESS: But didn't you just direct us to perform a new play called *Śakuntalā and the Ring of Recollection*?

DIRECTOR: Madam, I'm conscious again! For a moment I forgot.

> The mood of your song's melody
> carried me off by force,
> just as the swift dark antelope
> enchanted King Duṣyanta.[6]

Chandra Rajan's (1989):

ACTRESS: Why, Sir, what you mentioned right at the beginning – the new play entitled *The Recognition of Śakuntalā*.

DIRECTOR: You do well to remind me, dear lady. Indeed, my memory failed me for an instant: because,

> I was carried far, far away, lured
> by your impassioned song, compelling, . . .
> even as the King, Duhṣanta here,
> was, by the fleet fleeing antelope.[7]

All three scholars have used the past tense in translating the construction, '*Tavāsmi . . . hṛtaḥ'*:

Coulson:	'I *was* as *swept away*'
Miller:	'The mood . . . *carried* me *off*'
Rajan:	'I *was carried* far, far *away*'

But this past action must then be compared with an action which is continuing into the present: King Duṣyanta is just about to enter on the stage pursuing the antelope.

Therefore, all three translators falter when they are led by their choice of the past tense in translating '*Tavāsmi . . . hṛtaḥ*' into also using the past tense – or implying its use – in the second half of the comparison:

Coulson:	'As King Dushyanta here [*was swept away*] Drawn on and on by the swift-fleeing deer.'
Miller:	'just as the swift dark antelope *enchanted* King Duṣyanta.'
Rajan:	'even as the King, Duhṣanta here, *was* [*carried away*] by the fleet fleeing antelope.'

The question of tense here is not just an issue of pedantic, limited consequence. This question lies at the very heart of the interpretative framework one uses (knowingly or unknowingly) in the attempt to translate (or understand) this play. The Sūtradhāra has to move from a statement of an action in the past ('I *forgot*') to a statement of an action continuing into the present ('As King

Duṣyanta, here, *is being carried away*' [present continuous], '. . . *is carried away*' [present], or '. . . *has been carried away*' [present perfect tense])

For those readers, or translators, who do not understand that the Sūtradhāra's *alter ego* is Duṣyanta, the Sūtradhāra's 'being carried away' ends with his recovering his memory, and thus is an action which is interpreted and translated as past and completed ('I was carried away'). However, our metadramatic framework of interpretation is quite different. The Naṭī's song should be understood as casting a powerful, long lasting spell on her husband.[8] This spell, as it were, transforms him into King Duṣyanta, and its effect lasts throughout the play proper, only ending when, in the capacity of the Sūtradhāra and having given up the role of king, he recites the Bharatavākyam at the close of the drama. The learnèd audience in Kālidāsa's day would also have experienced the power of the Naṭī's spell and have enjoyed this transformation of Sūtradhāra into hero, of Naṭī into heroine – of drama into metadrama.

We give, here, the text of these two line, and our translation:

NAṬĪ *Ṇaṁ ajja-missēhiṁ puḍhamaṁ ēvva aṇṇattaṁ Ahiṇṇāṇa-Sa'uṁdalaṁ ṇāma apuvvaṁ ṇāḍa'aṁ pa'ō'ē adhikarī'adu'tti* |

SŪTRADHĀRAḤ *Āryē! Samyaganubhōdhitôsmi* | *Asmin-kṣaṇē vismṛtaṁ khalu mayā* | *Kutaḥ,*

Tavāsmi gīta-rāgēṇa hāriṇā prasabhaṁ hṛtaḥ |
Ēṣa rājēva duṣyantaḥ sāraṅgēṇātiraṁhasā ||5||

ACTRESS But the honorable ones have already ordered a performance of the unprecedented, new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'.

DIRECTOR Dear, it's good you've reminded me. For a moment, indeed, I forgot. For,

I have been carried away by the haunting, passionate melody of your song
As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

To state the last ślōka more explicitly:

I have been enchanted by the haunting, passionate melody of your song (and am being transformed into) King Duṣyanta, here, enchanted by the swift running antelope. (5)

Eroticism runs through this transformation as a thread of continuity – a point which has been clearly made by Chandra Rajan:

> The chase is a central motif in Act 1; the King is not merely chasing a deer, he is after a girl. The deer is closely associated with Śakuntalā through imagery and it leads the King into her world. . . . The chase motif is picked up in Act 2 where we come across several phrases pertaining to the sport of hunting: the hunter's skill; his elation when he gets the quarry. . . . All of these phrases conveying as they do the sense of dominance over the prey and gaining possession of it, characterize the initial attitude to and relation of Duhṣanta with Śakuntalā.[9]

The importance of being aware of these metadramatic transformations, first, from Nāndī ślōka to prologue, and then from prologue to play proper, lies in the resulting revelation of such elements of continuity which run through the play. If it is seen that the element of eroticism is firmly established in embryo form in the Nāndī of the *Śākuntala*, and then that this element is articulated and intensified in the prologue, we should certainly expect to see it reach its full-blown form in the play proper.

Now, touching on this very expectation is one of the major debates among scholars concerning the play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam': the dispute over the relative genuineness of various manuscript versions which have come down to us. The two main contenders for the crown of authority are, today, the so-called 'Bengālī' and 'Devanāgarī' recensions.

Sir William Jones's pioneering translation of the play, published in 1789, was based on the Bengālī version. Monier Williams, nearly a century later, preferred the Devanāgarī version. Monier Williams suspected the copyists in Bengal of interpolating passages:

> . . . the copyists in Bengal have been Paṇḍits whose *cacoëthes* for amplifying and interpolating has led to much repetition and amplification. Many examples might here be adduced; but I will only refer to the third Act of the Bengālī recension, where the love-scene between the King and Śakuntalā has been expanded to four or five times the length it occupies in the MSS. of the Devanāgarī recension.[10]

Barbara S. Miller, writing more recently, would give support to Monier Williams's suspicion:

> . . . the most prominent difference between the two recensions [the Bengālī and Devanāgarī] is the so-called śṛṅgāric elaboration that occurs in the final scene of Act Three in the Bengali Recension (Pischel 3.29-38). This prolonged erotic dialogue between the king and Śakuntalā adds nothing to the rasa of the act, but one can imagine its insertion into the play to please some patron. The verses are not among the best of the play . . . and the entire dialogue shows a lack of subtlety.[11]

But other contemporary scholars, such as Chandra Rajan and Michael Coulson, who have chosen to base their translations of the *Śākuntala* on the Bengālī recension, think differently. Chandra Rajan writes:

> One can argue that the Bengal text is more satisfying, aesthetically. The longer and more numerous prose passages and the additional verses, result in a smoother narrative and fuller characterization. The differences between the two recensions are found mainly in Act 1 and 3; they are particularly significant in the love episodes which the Devanāgarī treats in a rather perfunctory manner.[12]

We agree with Chandra Rajan. And our own position is that the Devanāgarī recension is a truncated, expurgated version of the 'original' text. The erotic elements hidden in the Nāndī-embryo, protected by dhvani, were, in the prologue-foetus, allowed to develop and become articulated because they were still protected by a veil of suggestiveness. But when these elements saw the light of day, *post-partum*, shorn of their protection, they suffered disfiguring amputation at the hands of the Devanāgarī copyists.

We have intended to use the word 'Victorianization', which appears in the title of this paper, only in its metaphorical sense, of course. In this sense it represents a reaction which began more than a thousand years ago and resulted in 'trimmed' texts of the *Śākuntala* and a certain 'blindness' on the part of commentators concerning the erotic implications of various passages in the play – especially in the Nāndī and in the prologue.

One final note: in the last three acts, eros has been tempered by suffering and separation. Towards the end of Act Seven, when Duṣyanta is reunited with Śakuntalā, and falls at her feet in remorse, she asks him to rise and says to him that their suffering must have been due to some wrong-doing of hers in a previous birth. From a metadramatic perspective, Śakuntalā's reference to some wrong-doing in a 'previous birth' suggests to us, at one level, the earlier period in her life (portrayed in the first three acts and the beginning of the fourth) when she falls in love with King Duṣyanta, submits to him, and then in the distraction of love, unknowingly incurs the wrath of the sage Durvāsas. Her 'wrong-doing' is hidden from her. At a deeper metadramatic level, however, 'previous birth' may also be taken as referring to the role of her *alter ego* (the Naṭī) in the prologue. The irony of this implication is striking. If Śakuntalā could only pierce the metadramatic barrier and remember the passion she felt, and the sexually suggestive language she used, in her previous incarnation as the Naṭī, she would indeed blush!

Notes

1. This paragraph paraphrases ideas expressed in the second paragraph on page x of Sadashiv Ambadas Dange's book, *Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1979).

2. *Śākuntala*, edited by Monier Williams (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1876), p. 2.

3. *The Works of Kālidāsa*, Vol. 1, edited by C.R. Devadhar (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986 [1934]), p. 178.

4. *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kālidāsa*, edited by B.S. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 38.

5. *Three Sanskrit Plays*, translated by Michael Coulson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 42.

6. Miller, p. 90.

7 *Kālidāsa: The Loom of Time,* translated by Chandra Rajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books [India], 1989), pp. 170-71.

8. This is expressed very nicely in Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990 [1951]), p. 148:

   > Kāma is of the essence of magic, magic of the essence of love; for among nature's own spells and charms that of love and sex is pre-eminent. This is the witchcraft that compels life to progress from one generation to the next, the spell that binds all creatures to the cycle of existences, through deaths and births.

9. Chandra Rajan, p. 16.

10. Monier Williams, p. vii.

11. B.S. Miller, pp. 334-35.

12. Chandra Rajan, p. 14.

Appendix

The Prologue of *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam*

The foremost creation of the Creator;
the carrier of the oblation according to rules;
The form of the sacrificer; those two who create time;
that element which pervades the universe, whose attribute is sound;

That which people say is the source of all beings;
and that which is the very breath of all living creatures –
Through these eight perceptible forms,
may the Lord protect you! (1)

(*After the Invocation, enter the Sūtradhāra*)

SŪTRADHĀRA: (*Looking back-stage*) Lady, if you have finished dressing, please come here.

ACTRESS: (*Entering*) Sir, here I am.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Dear, this audience is full of learnèd people. We are going to present a new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam', whose plot has been composed by Kālidāsa. Therefore, let every actor be well prepared.

ACTRESS: Because of your masterly 'performance', sir, nothing will appear ridiculous.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Dear, to tell the truth,

Unless the wise are completely satisfied,
A performance cannot be considered masterful.

For, however expert one may be,
There still lurks in the mind a sense of diffidence. (2)

ACTRESS: Sir, let it be. Just give the command what should be done next, sir.

SŪTRADHĀRA: What else but delight the ears of the members of this audience.
Sing a song about the summer season that has just begun and is still enjoyable,

When plunging deep into water's a pleasure,
When the trumpet flower adds to the fragrance of the forest breeze,

When deep-shade induced sleep
At the end of a playful day is heavenly! (3)

ACTRESS: Surely. (*She sings*)

Softly, softly, bees kiss
The filament's tender crest

Of the śirīṣa flower
Adorning gentle, sensuous women. (4)

SŪTRADHĀRA: Well sung, dear! Ah, your melody has transfixed the mind, the whole body of this royal theater is motionless, as in a painting! . . . What play are we going to put on now to please it?

ACTRESS: But the honorable ones have already ordered a performance of the unprecedented new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Dear, it's good you've reminded me. For a moment, indeed, I forgot. For,

I have been carried away by the haunting, passionate melody of your song,

As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

4

Bhāsamāna-Bhāsaḥ
or
The Case of the Chimerical Kavi

In the year 1909, T. Ganapati Sastri came across a palm-leaf manuscript containing a collection of ten Sanskrit plays plus a fragment of an eleventh. Subsequently, a complete version of the eleventh and two more plays of a character similar to the others were obtained by him.

Contrary to the usual practice in Sanskrit dramatic works, the author was nowhere mentioned in any of these thirteen plays. However, Ganapati Sastri attributed all thirteen to the poet Bhāsa on the basis of circumstantial evidence. His discovery and publication of the plays assumed great importance because before this no actual play of Bhāsa's had been known to have survived, and because of the universally held belief that India's greatest poet-dramatist, Kālidāsa, had praised Bhāsa as a playwright whose fame was already well established before he (Kālidāsa) ventured forth with his maiden drama, *Mālavikāgnimitra*.

In the face of this universal belief, we wish to propose and defend the following thesis:

Kālidāsa nowhere mentions any poet Bhāsa!

Generations of modern scholars have been assuming that Kālidāsa's statement put into the mouth of the Māriṣa, in the prologue of *Mālavikāgnimitra*, contains a compound expression which names *three* poets:

Bhāsa-Saumilla-Kaviputrādīnāṁ

Since the later Sanskrit critical works (from the 7th century A.D. onwards) have a number of references to a great poet, Bhāsa, it was of course only natural to assume this.

We wish to point out the fact, however, that '*bhāsa*' in the above compound is *equivocal*. Grammatically, it could be either a proper noun or an adjective. But our thesis would propose that neither Kālidāsa nor his audience knew any poet named Bhāsa (who was yet to be born, centuries later), and, therefore, Kālidāsa intended – and his audience understood – '*bhāsa*' simply as an adjective.

Let us analyze the full sentence:

Prathita- yaśasāṁ bhāsa-
well-established fame-(possessors) reputed

saumilla-kaviputrādīnāṁ prabandhān-atikramya
Saumilla Kaviputra & others works overlooking

vartamāna-kavēḥ kālidāsasya kriyāyāṁ kathaṁ bahumānaḥ |
present poet's Kālidāsa's work-in how prefer

> How is it that the works of the reputed Saumilla, Kaviputra, and others of long established renown, are overlooked in favor of a play by the young poet, Kālidāsa?

Our case does not, however, rest on mere grammatical possibility. We seek further support in evidence found in the metadramatic relation of the prologue to the play proper of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*.

As argued earlier, we have maintained that in classical Sanskrit plays, the prologue represents one layer of dramatization, and the play proper is metadrama in relation to its prologue.[1] The play proper is a play within a play. Further, we have maintained that the Sūtradhāra goes on to take the role of the leading male character in the play proper, and his assistant (the Naṭī, Vidūṣaka, or Māriṣa) takes the role of another specific character in the play proper.

In *Mālavikāgnimitra*, the Sūtradhāra takes the role of King Agnimitra. And the Sūtradhāra's assistant (Māriṣa) takes the role of the Vidūṣaka, Gautama. The objection raised by the Māriṣa/Gautama in the prologue ('How can poets of long established renown be overlooked in favor of a young poet?') is thus full of dramatic irony. The parallel situation at the metadramatic (play proper) level being hinted at is the rivalry between Agnimitra's (older) chief queens (Dhāriṇī and Irāvatī) on the one hand and the beautiful, talented, and *young* Mālavikā on the other. (Scholars who have supposed that Kālidāsa was unstintingly praising the old poets have failed to reckon with the powerful irony of the Sūtradhāra's response to the Māriṣa's objection.)

Now, the parallelism in the irony would be somewhat disjoint if the Māriṣa lists the names of *three* established old poets (Bhāsa, Saumilla, and Kaviputra) when only the two senior queens are known by name and appear in the play proper. But the parallelism is perfect if 'bhāsa' is an adjective and not a proper noun: Saumilla/Dhāriṇī and Kaviputra/Irāvatī.

The response of the Sūtradhāra (Agnimitra-to-be) to the objections raised by the Māriṣa (Gautama-to-be) is both an explicit defense of the young poet, Kālidāsa, and an implied defense of the young Mālavikā:

Ayē vivēka viśrantam-abhihitam | *Paśya*:
ah discernment lacking spoken-of look

Purāṇam-ity- ēva na sādhu sarvaṁ
old thus just-because not charming all
Na cāpi kāvyaṁ navam-ity- avadyam |
neither art-work new thus unpraiseworthy

Santaḥ parīkṣyānyatarad-bhajantē
true-connois. examining-other-way favor
Mūḍhaḥ para- pratyayanēya-buddhiḥ ||2||
fool others opinions mind of

Ah! Spoken with a complete lack of discernment! Look:

Not everything is charming just because it's old.
Neither is a Work of Art unpraiseworthy simply because it's new.
A true connoisseur makes an in-depth study of them all before judging,
Whereas a fool goes by the opinions of others. (2)

The *dhvani* in this passage paints a picture of Agnimitra (the Sūtradhāra's *alter ego*) as a judge of women (Works of Art) – a judge whose close examination (*parīkṣya*) is thorough and from all angles.

The Māriṣa then says: 'The honorable gentlemen will judge' ('*Āryamiśrāḥ pramāṇam*'). That is, the audience will be the judge. The idea of the actual audience judging the play (*Mālavikāgnimitra*) is paralleled at a metadramatic level by the judging of Mālavikā's performance in the little dance drama she presents within the play proper. (This dance drama is a drama-within-a-drama-within-a-drama.)

After the Māriṣa's remark about the members of the assembly being the judge, the Sūtradhāra is impatient to proceed with putting on the play proper:

SŪTRADHĀRAḤ *Tēna hi tvaratāṁ bhavān* |
then quick be-you

Śirasā prathama-gṛhītām- ājñām- icchāmi pariṣadaḥ kartum |
head-(bowed) at-once accepted command want-I assembly's to carry-out

Dēvyā iva dhāriṇyāḥ sēvā- dakṣaḥ pari-janôyam ||3||
goddess as Dhāriṇī's serving cleverly assistant-this

DIRECTOR Well, then, hurry up!

As an assistant cleverly serving
The goddess Dhāriṇī,[2]
I want to carry out at once the pariṣad's command,
Accepted with a bow. (3)

The Sūtradhāra has been commanded by the 'audience' to put on the play, *Mālavikāgnimitra*. The very title of the play signifies the union of the heroine, Mālavikā, with the hero, King Agnimitra. As the Sūtradhāra is going to take the role of Agnimitra, the audience's command implies that he (the Sūtradhāra/Agnimitra) will be united with Mālavikā. His almost obsequious eagerness (expressed in Verse 3) to fulfill that command is heightened by his comparing himself to (and seeing himself as) a clever servant of Queen Dhāriṇī. The comparison immediately suggests the imminent entrance in the next scene of the maid, Bakulāvalikā, a clever servant, indeed, of Queen Dhāriṇī; but the statement also implies the almost farcical debasement throughout the play of the king in pursuit of his union with Mālavikā – he (both figuratively and literally) throws himself at the feet of his two senior queens and Mālavikā! Further, King Agnimitra, in several passages of the play proper, explicitly emphasizes his servitude to Queen Dhāriṇī (in his second line after verse 19 of Act I and his first line after verse 18 of Act V), and to Mālavikā (in verse 13 of Act III and in verse 12 of Act IV).

The plausibility of our thesis (that Kālidāsa's '*bhāsa*' is an adjective and not a proper noun) will thus depend on one's assessment of the over-all metadramatic structure which we have outlined and the strength of the particular parallelism which we find between six persons: the two senior, 'established' pairs, Saumilla/Dhāriṇī and Kaviputra/Irāvatī; and the young 'debutantes', Kālidāsa/Mālavikā.

Postscript 2005

If our transformation of an ancient poet, Bhāsa, into an adjective is too far-fetched to be countenanced, there is still another reading of the passage in question which would preserve our metadramatic framework. Kālidāsa, in the passage, "*Bhāsa-saumilla-kaviputrādīnām*", could be referring to the earlier poets Bhāsa and Saumilla and other seeming 'sons-of-poets' ('*kavi-putrādīnām*') – in the mode of '*marīci-putrādīnām*'. Then the parallelism found between the six persons would be the two senior, 'established' pairs, Bhāsa/Dhāriṇī and Saumilla/Irāvatī; and the young 'debutantes' Kālidāsa/Mālavikā. On either interpretation, please note, Kālidāsa's comparison is *not* flattering to the older poets!

King Mahēndra's assumption of the *nom de plume* 'Bhāsa', as we suggest in the 9th Study in this book, would then humorously be playing on the word *bhāsa's* meaning of 'appearance' or 'semblance': *Bhāsamāna-Bhāsaḥ*!

Notes

1. In the first and second chapters.
2. It is a conceit that a ruler has for his consort the goddess Earth – and 'Dhāriṇī' is also one of the names of the Earth Goddess.

5

You or Us?

Kēcid-bhagnāḥ yuṣmad-asmat-prakriyāsu |[1]

– Bhaṭṭōji Dikṣita

Our observation is simple: in classical Sanskrit plays, it is standard practice for the Sūtradhāra, in the Nāndī ślōka (the opening verse of invocation), to address the audience *directly* as 'you' (plural), and in the Prastāvanā (the prologue to the play proper), to refer to the audience, but only *indirectly*. In the play proper, of course, there is no reference whatsoever to the audience.

This transition from direct address in the Nāndī to indirect reference in the Prastāvanā is part of the art of carrying the audience progressively from the world of everyday reality into the fully dramatic world of the play proper. If, therefore, a translator gets mixed up on personal pronouns in the Nāndī or Prastāvanā, the error will not be merely grammatical.

David Gitomer, in translating the Nāndī ślōka of "Urvaśī Won by Valor", uses the personal pronoun 'us' instead of 'you':

. . . may Śiva, immovable god, bring **us** final bliss![2]

The last line of the Nāndī in the original text, however, reads:

Sa sthāṇuḥ sthira-bhakti-yōga-sulabhō niḥśrēyasāyāstu **vaḥ** ||1||[3]

A few lines later, in the prologue, Gitomer's translation has the Sūtradhāra directly addressing the audience:

DIRECTOR: Now, as for **you** worthy people, . . .[4]

But the Sanskrit reads:

SŪTRADHĀRAḤ *Yāvad-idānīm-āryamiśrān vijñāpayāmi* |[5]

In the same publication, Edwin Gerow, in translating the Nāndī ślōka of "Mālavikā and Agnimitra", uses 'our' and 'we' instead of 'your' and 'you':

May Śiva dispel the darkness from **our** sight
that **we** may view **our** path aright![6]

However, the last pāda of the Sanskrit text reads:

Sanmārgālōkanāya vyapanayatu sa **vas**-*tāmasīṁ vṛttim-īśaḥ* ||1||[7]

That, ordinarily, the Sūtradhāra addresses the audience directly in the Nāndī, and only indirectly refers to it in the Prastāvanā, may appear to be an inconsequentially simple observation. But, in fact, the implications of this observation may be exceedingly subtle. Consider the Nāndī and Prastāvanā of King Mahēndra's play, *Bhagavadajjuka*, which *deviate* from the norm.

The first word of the Nāndī ślōka of the *Bhagavadajjuka* – the very first word which the Sūtradhāra utters on stage – is '*tvām*' (thee), a singular form, in which the members of the audience, assuming that it was directed at them, might sense a puzzling familiarity on the part of the Sūtradhāra in his manner of addressing them.

A further surprise to the members of the audience would come from the fact that the Sūtradhāra makes no reference to them in the Prastāvanā. Neither does he follow the usual practice, in the Prastāvanā, of announcing the name of the playwright and the title of the play which is going to be performed before the audience.

Now, we would account for these "omissions" and seeming familiarity by explaining that at the dramatic levels of the Nāndī and the Prastāvanā of *this* play (*Bhagavadajjuka*), there is, for the Sūtradhāra, no audience, no playwright, and no titled play! The play proper, which is to follow, is to be understood, at these introductory dramatic levels, as an extempore, private creation of the Sūtradhāra (hence no playwright and no title) used to teach his assistant, the Vidūṣaka, what a farce is.

On our interpretation, in the make-believe world of the Nāndī and Prastāvanā of this play, the Nāndī is actually addressed to a single person. The 'thee' ('*tvām*'), at this level, is addressed to the Sūtradhāra's assistant, the Vidūṣaka, and not to any audience. Hence the author's deliberate use of the singular pronoun '*tvām*' in the Nāndī ślōka:

Tvāṁ pātu lakṣaṇāḍhyaḥ sura-vara-mukuṭēndra-cāru-maṇi-ghṛṣṭaḥ |
Rāvaṇa-namitāṅguṣṭhō rudrasya sadārcitaḥ pādaḥ ||1||[8]

At the very beginning of the Prastāvanā, the Sūtradhāra makes it clear that, for him, there is no audience. In line 3, he tells the Vidūṣaka, "If there's no one around, I'll tell you some pleasant news." And the Vidūṣaka looks all around and answers, "Sir, no one is in the house, so do tell me the pleasant news." This exchange is a humorous way of letting the unacknowledged, actual audience know that there is no audience in the Sūtradhāra's "house" – that is, in his make-believe theater – or, shall we say, in his 'meta'-theater.

Let us offer an analogy in order to explain the effect that the *Bhagavadajjuka's* Nāndī ślōka and the opening lines of its Prastāvanā would have had on the audience of Mahēndra's day.

Imagine that your name is Perry Shudder and that you are walking on a busy city street. Someone calls out, "Hi! Perry, old boy. May God protect thee," You turn to see who it is who is calling you and wishing you God's protection, only to realize that you are not the 'Perry' being addressed, and that both the strangers are paying no attention whatsoever to you.

This analogy would indicate the kind of surprise the members of the original audience would have felt when, after listening to the Nāndī ślōka and wondering whether they were being familiarly addressed in the collective singular, they began to realize that the Sūtradhāra had, in fact, not been addressing them at all in the Nāndī – and that he now has made it clear, in the opening of the Prastāvanā, that they 'don't exist' (in his make-believe, dramatic world)!

That the Sūtradhāra is putting on only an extempore practice play, without benefit of an acknowledged audience, is further reinforced in line 5, where the Sūtradhāra reports that he has just met an astrologer who has predicted that on the seventh day from that very day, he (the Sūtradhāra) will be putting on a play before an audience at the royal palace.

Finally, there is a structural parallelism between the *Bhagavad-ajjuka's* Nāndī/Prastāvanā transition and its Prastāvanā/play-proper transition. This parallelism would support our contention that the Sūtradhāra is addressing the Nāndī ślōka to his assistant, the Vidūṣaka, while ignoring the existence of any audience.

The Sūtradhāra, in the Nāndī, says:

> May the ever-worshipped foot of Rudra protect thee (*tvām*)!

And, immediately following the Nāndī, in the opening of the Prastāvanā, the Sūtradhāra calls his assistant: "Vidūṣaka! Vidūṣaka!"

The second ślōka, at the end of the Prastāvanā, parallels the Nāndī ślōka. The Sūtradhāra addresses the Vidūṣaka, using the singular '*tvam*' (thou):

> Since thou (*tvam*) art determined to become enlightened,
> a follower of the path of virtue, . . .
> As a disciple, follow me!
> a bull of a Brahmin mendicant, master yogi. (2)

The Sūtradhāra and Vidūṣaka then leave the stage, and in a moment return on stage in their meta-roles of the Parivrājaka (guru) and Shāṇḍilya (disciple) to begin the play proper. The Parivrājaka enters the stage first, and his first words are: "Shāṇḍilya! Shāṇḍilya!" (calling his metamorphosed side-kick).

The above parallelism may be expressed concisely as follows:

Nāndī ślōka: '*tvām*' / Prastāvanā's opening: "Vidūṣaka! Vidūṣaka!"

Prastāvanā's ślōka: '*tvam*' / play-proper's opening: "Shāṇḍilya! Shāṇḍilya!"

In the introduction which we have written to the play *Bhagavad-ajjuka*, we have argued that, indirectly, through *dhvani*, the Nāndī ślōka suggests King Mahēndra as the author of the play. And we have pointed out that, toward the end of the play, in line 229, Shāṇḍilya –

again indirectly, through *dhvani* – gives us the name of the play. In the paragraphs above, we have argued that though the audience might at first assume that the Nāndī is addressed to them, the Nāndī is actually being addressed, in its direct sense, to the Vidūṣaka (Shāṇḍilya-to-be). Thus, the reference to the audience, taken in its collective singular sense, is given only indirectly through *dhvani* – creating a paradoxical effect.

Notes

1. The full śl ōka:

   Kēcid-bhagnās-sudhyupāsya-prayōgē
   Kēcid-bhagnāḥ yuṣmad-asmat-prakriyāsu |
   Kēcid-bhagnāḥ kārakārtha-prayōgē
   Sarvē bhagnāḥ yaṅ-luṅ-anta-prayōgē ||

   And our translation:

A few bungle in working out the formation of '*sudhyupāsya*';
A few bungle in working out (the grammatical terminations of) '*yuṣmat*' and '*asmat*';
A few bungle in working out the '*kārakārtha*';
But everyone bungles in working out the ending of '*yaṅ*' and '*luṅ*'.

2. *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kālidāsa*, edited by Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 181.
3. *Works of Kālidāsa, Vol. I, Dramas*, edited and translated into English by C.R. Devadhar (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1985 [1966]), p. 2 of the text of "Vikramōrvaśīyam".
4. *Theater of Memory*, p. 181.
5. *Works of Kālidāsa, Vol. I*, p. 2 of the text of "Vikramōrvaśīyam".
6. *Theater of Memory*, p. 255.
7. *Works of Kālidāsa, Vol. I*, p. 2 of the text of "Mālavikāgnimitram".
8. For our translation, see Part 2 of this book.

6

Abhinavagupta's Discussion of Metadrama (c. 1000 A.D.)

(The text is excerpted from his commentary on the *Nāṭya-Śāstra – Nāṭyashāstra of Bharatamuni*, Vol. 3, Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1981, pp. 279-284.)

1. *Samastēna śākhā-vyāpārēṇa vartanā-pradhānatayā prayuktaḥ śākhābhinayaḥ 'śirō-mukha-jaṅghōru' ity-ādinā kṛtaikavad-bhāvēna dvandva-padasamūhēna punaḥ ślōka-dvandvēna* [*ślōkas* 48 & 49], *"Nāṭyāyitam"-ity-ādi "Sthāna" ity-ādi ca* ǀ

2. *Pūrva-praviṣṭasya pātrasya tad-rūpam-udīkṣamāṇasya apara-pātrasya pravēśaḥ tad-dhruvā-gāna-tat-sūcā-parikramaṇādi kiṁcin-nāṭyam-astīti tat-kālē pūrva-pātrēṇa yē samucitā upacārāḥ kriyantē nāṭyāyitam-ity-ādyâryāyās-tātparyam* ǀ 3. *Pūrva-praviṣṭēna pātrēna saha saṅgamaṁ vidhāya paścāt-praviṣṭa-pātra-parikramaṇādi kālē sthānakēnaivāsīnasya tūṣṇīṁ sthitau prāptāyam-abhinayaḥ tad-api nāṭyāyitam-ity-aparāryās-tātparyam-iti Śrī-Śaṅkukādyāḥ, tac-cāyuktam* ǀ 4. *Anyōnya-saṅgamāvadhi yat-pātrasya cēṣṭitaṁ tad-aparôdita-vākyārtha-sūcanōcitatvaṁ vā nir-vacanakādāv-aucitya-mātrādēvōpanataṁ vā, pūrvatra-pakṣē nivṛtty-aṅkuraḥ uttaratrāṅkura ity-ubhyaṁ na nāṭyāyitam* ǀ

5. *Tathā hi prayōga-kuśalāḥ prāhuḥ ēvaṁ-vidhē viṣayē dharmī – 'likhati' iti, 'pālayann-āstē' iti, tathā 'puṣpāpacayaṁ nāṭayatī'ti* ǀ 6. *Nāṭyasya sandhāna-rūpatvaṁ ca vākyē sūcādīnām-api saṁbhavaty-ēva* ǀ 7. *Na vā nāṭyēna nāṭyaṁ sandhīyata iti nāṭyāyita – vācōyuktir- api katham* ǀ 8. *Tasmād-ittham-ētad vyākhyātavyam – iha yadā svapnôpy-ēka-ghanō dṛśyatē tan-madhyata ēva ca kiṁcid-dṛśyamānaḥ parasya svapna ēva jāgrad-rūpatām-āpāditē "Svapnôyaṁ mayā dṛṣṭa" iti varṇyatē, tadā jāgrad-apēkṣayā svapna-vyavahāraḥ, na tatra pāramārthika ity-aupacārikaṁ tad-apēkṣaṁ tasya svapnatvam-iti tasya svapnāyita-vyavaharō dṛṣṭaḥ* ǀ 9. *Ēvam-ihāpi nāṭya ēka-ghana-svabhāvē hi sthitē tatraivāsatya-nāṭyānu-pravēśān-nāṭya-pātrēṣu sāmājikī-bhūtēṣu tad-apēkṣayā yad-anyaṁ nāṭyaṁ tasya tad-apēkṣayā nāṭya-rūpatvaṁ pāramārthikam-iti nāṭyāyitam-ucyatē* ǀ 10. *Tac-ca dvividhaṁ nāṭaka-rūpaka-niṣṭham-ēva vā kāryāntaraniṣṭhaṁ vā tasya kramēṇa lakṣaṇam-āryā-dvitayēnôcyatē* ǀ 11. *Nāṭyē yat-pravēśakair-nāṭyāntara-gatair-iva pātraiḥ ata ēva tataḥ 'praviśatī'ty-uktaiḥ saṅgamaḥ kriyatē tan-nāṭyāyitam* ǀ 12. *Kīdṛśair-abhinaya-dvarēṇa yat-sūcanā tayōpacāraiḥ paramārthatayōpacāryamāṇaiḥ* ǀ 13. *Nanūbhayam-api nāṭyaṁ kasmān-na bhavati natv-ēka-ghanatēty-āśaṅkyāha kāla-prakarṣa-lakṣaṇādd-hētōr-anyōnya-bhinna-kālatvāt kathaṁ tatraika-ghanatā yuktēti bhāvaḥ* ǀ 14. *Yāvad-iti bhūyas-taraṁ prabandhaṁ vyāpnōti parimitaṁ vā tat-sarvaṁ nāṭyāyitam-ity-arthaḥ* ǀ 15. *Tathā yāvad-iti svapnē svapnāntaraṁ tatrāpy-anyat-svapnāntaram-ity-ādi-nyāyēna vā bhavatv-ēka-ghana-svapnāyita-vṛttyā vā sarvathā tan-nāṭyāyitam* ǀ 16. *Tatrāsya bahutara-vyāpinō bahu-garbha-svapnāyita-tulyasya nāṭyāyitasyôdāharaṇaṁ mahā-kavi-Subandhu-nibaddhō Vāsavadattā-Nāṭyadhārākhyaḥ samasta ēva prayōgaḥ* ǀ 17. *Tatra hi Bindusāraḥ prayōjya-vastuka "Udayana-Caritē" sāmājikī-kṛtaḥ, asāv-apy-Udayanō "Vāsavadattā-cēṣṭitē"* ǀ 18. *Ēṣaṁ cārthaḥ:– svasmin sūtra-rūpakē dṛṣṭē sujñānō bhavati* ǀ 19. *Ati-vaitatya-bhayāt-tu na pradarśitaḥ ēkas-tu pradēśa udāhriyatē tatrahy-Udayanē sāmājikī-kṛtē sūtradhāra-prayōgaḥ – "Tava sucaritair-ēṣa jayati" iti, tata Udayanaḥ "Kutō mama sucaritānī'ti sāsraṁ vilapati:–*

20. *"Ēhy-amba kiṁ Kaṭaka-Piṅgala-pālakais-tair-bhaktôham-apy-Udayanaḥ suta-lālanīyaḥ* ǀ

21. *"Yaugandharāyaṇa mamānaya rāja-putrīṁ hā harṣa-rakṣita gatas-tvam-aprabhāvaḥ* ǁ*"*

22. *Tatraiva Bindusāraḥ sāmājikī-bhūtaḥ paramārthatām-abhimanya-mānō "Dhanyā khalu (idṛśair-bhaktasya) pralāpaiḥ" ity-ucchvasati* | 23. *Pratīhārī ātmagataṁ – "A'aṇida-para-mattha-kalaṇēhiṁ piccha'i khu dēvō" ity-ādi* |

24. *Parimita-vyāpinō nir-garbhasya nāṭyāyitasyōdāharaṇaṁ yathā "Bālarāmāyaṇē" garbhāṅkē 'Sītā-svayamvarē'* |

25. *Ēvaṁ tāvan-nāṭaka-rūpaka-niṣṭhaṁ nāṭyāyitaṁ vyākhyātam* |

26. *Kāryāntara-niṣṭhaṁ tūcyatē* | 27. *Iha yadâbhyantara-rasāviṣṭatā bhavati tadā dhruvā-yōgābhinayaḥ sva-tulyatām-āpādya-mānaḥ paraspara-militâkārakatāṁ kākatālīyēnōpanipātāt (saṁbhāvyatē)* | *Yathā –*

28. *Naliṇīdala'ē ṇīsaha-sukadēhiṁ ātathā mucca'i* |

29. *Pala'i vi'abbha'i vijja'i haṁsī naliṇī-vaṇē'vi ṇatthijja'i* ||

30. *Ity-ādau* | 31. *Tatra hi prayōktur-ēvam-abhisandhidhruvām-abhinayēna darśayāmīti* |
32. *Kiṁ tu prāsādikya-dhruvāyāṁ "Yatra vākyēna nōktaṁ syāt tat-tu gītaṁ prasādhyēt"* (canto 32) *iti vacanāt dhruvārthas-tatrōcita āghātaḥ, prayōgō hi bahu-vidhāṁ madanāvasthāṁ nāṭayatīti* |
33. *Ēvaṁ bhūtôṅkura-svabhāvaḥ paurvāparya-paryālōcana-vaśāt tathā-bhūta ēvōpanipatita iti, aprayujya-mānāpi dhruva-kākatālīyēna prayōgam-upāṁśu-rūpā nāṭyam-api nāṭyam-iva śāstē iti tathā-vidha-nāṭyāyitatvāpādakaḥ śārīrābhinayō nāṭyāyitam-iti darśayati "Sthānē dhruvāsv-abhinayō yaḥ kriyata" iti* | 34. *Bhāvair-vyabhicāriyibhiḥ rasaiḥ sva-sthāyibhiḥ yē saṁprayuktā āviṣṭaḥ tat-saṁpādanaika-manasaḥ prayōktāras-tair-yō dhruvāsv-iti druvārtha-viṣayôbhinayaḥ kriyatē* |
35. *Kathaṁ sthānē prasaṅgē sati kākatālīya-vaśād-ity-arthaḥ* | 36. *Yôbhinayaḥ śārīrō nāṭyāyitam* |
37. *Nanu kiṁ prati-padam-abhinayatā nēty-āha harṣādibhir-iti tat-sūcakair-aṅgōpāṅga-sattvair-ity-arthaḥ* | 38. *Tad-apīti na kēvalaṁ pūrvaṁ yāyad-idam-apīti* |

39. *"Yatrānyōktaṁ vākyaṁ sūcābhinayēna yōjayēd-anyaḥ* |

40. *"Tat-saṁbandhārthaṁ kathaṁ bhavēn-nivṛty-aṅkuraḥ sôtha* ||"

41. *Anyōktaṁ vākyaṁ katham-anya-sūcābhinayē citta-vṛtti-sūcakēnāṅgōpāṅga-sattva-kramēṇa darśayēd-ity-āśaṅkya hētum-āha tat-saṁbandhaṁ katham-iti bījādēr-nivṛttiṁ yathāṅkuraḥ sūcayati ēvaṁ nivṛttē vākyē tad-aṅkurayati nivṛttyaṅkura uktaḥ* | 42. *Yathā hi vidūṣakēna Vatsarājē "Avi suhayadi dē lō'aṇāṇaṁ" iti pṛṣṭē Sāgarikā:– "Saccaṁ jīvida-maraṇāṇaṁ antaraṁ vaṭṭāmi" iti, tatō rājā – "Sukhayatīti kim-ucyatē* | 43. *Kṛcchrēnōru-yugaṁ vyatītya suciram" ity-ādi paṭhati* |
44. *Tasmin kramēṇākarṇya-mānē Sāgarikāyāṁ tathābhūta saṁśayōtkaṇṭha-rāgōdgama-janitō vyabhicāri-sattva-yōjitaḥ sattvāṅgōpāṅga-parispandō dṛśya-mānō nivṛttyaṅkurō nāṭyāyitaṁ ca "Vāsavadattā-Nāṭyadhārē" prati-padaṁ dṛśyatē* |

Our Own Translation

1. Considering, important, the primacy of the actions rendered by all limbs – head, face, shanks, thighs, etc. (each action being done in an ordered succession) – the Śākhābhinaya is introduced by means of a *samāhāra-dvandva* – a linguistic form which, by aggregating closely related things, makes (them) look like (they are organically) 'one' – and (is dealt with), again, through a couple of ślōkas: (i) "*Nāṭyāyita* . . ." [*NŚ* 22.48] and (ii) "*Sthāna* . . ." [*NŚ* 22.49].

[*Previous interpretations of* 'nāṭyāyita' ('*metadrama*') *and Abhinava's rejection of them*:]

2. The rendering of the dhruvā song into a little dramatic action (*nāṭya*) through a translation of the song into suggestive pantomimic movements of a particular gait, etc., by the second character who enters looking at the form of the first character, who has already entered, as well as the formal act of (getting up and) greeting (him) shown by the suggestive gestures of the first – that is metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*), and that is what is meant by the first ślōka in the Āryāmeter [*NŚ* 22.48]. 3. The dramatic action (*abhinaya*) which we have (*prāptāyām*) when the first character is (once again) seated after the second character has met him and moves away from him – even that (*tad-api*) is metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*), and that is what is meant by the second ślōka in the Āryāmeter [*NŚ* 22.49]. These (foregoing) interpretations by Śrī-Śaṅkuka and others are non-sensical.

[*Abhinava's counter-argument*:]

4. [Cf. 48] Until the meeting between the two (characters) is over, the 'action' of one of the characters either shows its suitability to indicate the effect ('*artha*' – 'effect', that is, on one character) of any statement that may be made by the other character, or is an action that has occurred merely because it is suitable for a pantomimic representation ('*nirvacanakād-*' = 'dumb-show'); thus, (all that can be said is that) there is *nivṛttyaṅkura* in the former and *aṅkura* in the latter, and, therefore, both (examples) are not (adequate to present a comprehensive view of) metadrama.

[*A recommendation of the use of* 'Nāṭya-dharmī' *instead of* 'Nāṭyāyita':]

5. Even so, performance experts say that, "In matters of this kind, (the stage direction) must be treated as (*nāṭya-*)*dharmī* (as illustrated by such phrases as:) 'is writing', 'is expecting', 'acts out collecting flowers', etc. 6. Continuity of action (through connecting links) is provided by the suggestive hints (found) in the (stage direction) statements." 7. (Putting forth the same argument in a different way, they say that in this context,) "The need of bringing about organic connection between two actions does not arise, and, therefore, how can (one) say there is metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*) here?"

8. (In answer, Abhinava says:) the explanation goes like this: when a dream is experienced as one solid, continuous, organic whole, and something perceived – which is but another dream occurring in the middle of that dream – seems to assume the appearance of wakefulness, and (the dreamer) says (to himself), "I have been dreaming", then, with regard to that spectator-like dreamer, his (imagined) wakefulness is (but) the stuff of dreams; there is nothing ultimately real about that 'wakefulness'; only in an analogical sense is it wakefulness, and, as such it is (still) a state of dreaming, and, as a consequence, it is to be regarded as an instance of meta-dreaming (*svapnāyita*).

9. So also in (the realm of) drama (*nāṭya*), when a play (i.e., the play proper) is one solid continuous, organic whole, and when, in the middle of that *nāṭya* (the play proper), a 'make-believe play' ('*asatya-nāṭaka*' [that is, a 'play-within-a-play']) appears, and (some of) the characters of the *nāṭya* (the play proper) become spectators (of the make-believe play or the play-within-a-play), then, with respect to those spectators (of the play-within-a-play), the make-believe play is regarded as assuming the appearance of a real play, and, as such it is called metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*).

10. It (metadrama/*nāṭyāyita*) is of two kinds, (one of which is the superimposition of) a make-believe play (*rūpaka*) on the play proper (*nāṭaka*), and the other, the metamorphic (*śārīrābhinaya*) representation of the inner (emotional) drama – the definition of which (that is, of both) is given in due order, in the two ślōkas in the Āryāmeter [*NŚ* 22.48-49]. 11. In drama, when some of the characters, having been introduced by such directions as 'then enter', pass (from the play proper) into the inner drama – their passing over is (an instance of) metadramatization (*nāṭyāyita*). 12. To the question as to how they act this passing over (into the inner drama), the answer is, by using suggestive pantomime (*sūcābhinaya*).

13. Anticipating the objection (to the use of the term '*nāṭyāyita*'/'metadrama') that is likely to be raised (*āśaṅkya*) – "Why can't both (*satya-nāṭaka* and *asatya-nāṭaka*) together (*nanūbhayam-api*) be thought of as (simply) '*nāṭya*' (the play proper, single-level drama)?" – (Bharata) says, "If that were done, then there would be a lack of one solid continuity (the '*ēka-ghanatā*' that is required of a simple, single-level drama)." (Continuing this line of argument, Abhinava says,) "Because there are two distinct space-time encapsulations (– '*kāla-prakarṣa*' – giving rise to two distinct levels of dramatizations in the form of *satya-nāṭaka* and *asatya-nāṭaka*, despite the fact that the second level [*asatya-nāṭaka*] as well as the space-time encapsulation [*kāla-prakarṣa*] involved in it is an offshoot of the first level and is always organically related to it), how can one speak (here) of a simple single-level drama?

14. The word ‘*yāvat*’ [in ślōka 48] means whether it (metadrama/*nāṭyāyita*) is of (the nature of) manifold permeation (*bahutara-vyāpī*) or of limited permeation (*parimita-vyāpī*) – all of these cases (*tat-sarvam*) are meta-dramatizations (*nāṭyāyita*). 15. Furthermore (*tathā*), the word ‘*yāvat*’ implies that, going by the analogy of the dream-within-a-dream, and there, too, another dream within the (second) dream (and so on), or (in other words) going by the logic of one solid continuous dream (involving) dreams within dreams in ordered succession, the whole thing is a meta-dramatization (*nāṭyāyita*).

16. (As) an example of the full use of the manifold-permeating type of metadrama which is the equivalent of a multi-wombed (multi-emboxed) meta-‘*dream*’-atization (*bahu-garbha-svapnāyita-tulyasya*), is (the play) entitled “Vāsavadattā-Nāṭyadhāra” written by the great poet Subandhu. 17. Therein, Bindusāra is made into a spectator in the play dealing with the story of Udayana; this same Udayana (is made into a spectator in the play) dealing with the story of Vāsavadattā. 18. This is the meaning here: on seeing himself in the role of the Sūtradhāra, he (Bindusāra) becomes fully understanding.

19. For fear of too much elaboration, (the entire example) is not being given; at that time, when Udayana takes the role of a spectator (of the play-within-the-play), the Sūtradhāra (of the make-believe play – a part which is played by the character ‘Bindusāra’ of the play proper) declares, “This (performance) triumphs on account of your virtuous qualities”; then Udayana (bursts out), “Where are my virtuous qualities?”, and he weeps and cries out:

20. “*Come, Mother!* [Vāsavadattā’s mother] – *What can the guards, Kaṭaka and Piṅgala, do? – Here am I, Udayana, a devotee* (*of yours* [that is, of Vāsavadattā’s mother]) *fit to be treated as* (*your*) *son.*

21. “*O Yaugandharāyaṇa! Bring my princess to me – Alas! Protector of* (*my*) *happiness,* (*you have*) *vanished, along with* (*your*) *splendor!*

22. Exactly at this point, Bindusāra [the meta-Sūtradhāra] becomes a spectator of what is ‘really’ going on [‘*paramārthatām*’ – in the present context, this is ‘reality’ only at the *satya-nātaka* level!], heaves a sigh, and remarks, “Blessed, indeed, are we by the out-pouring of grief of such a devoted one!” 23. The Doorkeeper [a character in the play proper, the *satya-nāṭaka*] says, in an aside, “It’s because (the attention of) My Lord [King Bindusāra, playing the make-believe Sūtradhāra] has been brought back to reality [by the ‘spectator’ Udayana’s outburst] that he has spoken like that!”

24. An example of metadrama of (the type of) limited permeation – not of the multi-wombed type – is (found) in the Sītā-*svayaṁvara* (episode) in the *garbhāṅka* of the (play) “Bāla-Rāmāyaṇa”.

25. Thus, the metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*) of the type of a make-believe play (*rūpaka*) within the play (*nāṭaka*) has been commented on.

26. (*Karyāntara-niṣṭham*:) The metamorphic *śārīrābhinaya* representations of the inner (emotional) drama will be dealt with now. 27. In this world, when rasas take possession of the heart, then the *dhruvā-yōga-abhinaya* achieving an organic identity, as if miraculously (*kākatālīyēnōpanipātāt*), in the form it takes from the mutual agglomeration (*paraspara-militâkāratām*), is imagined (*saṁbhāvyatē*), as is illustrated by:

28. *“The love-lorn she-swan swoons on the intensely pleasure-yielding lotus petals,*

29. *“Halts for a long time, goes around, never leaving the lotus clusters.”*

30-31. In such contexts as this, the actor’s declaration (to himself) is, “I’ll show (the whole thing) by means of *dhruvā-yōga-abhinaya*.” 32. But then (*kiṁ tu*), when the propitiatory dhruvā (*prāsādikya-dhruvāyaṁ*) is sung, (on that occasion, *dhruvā-yōga-abhinaya*) is appropriate as is justified by the statement: “Where (something) is not presented by speech (*vākya*), the same thing, the ‘song’ must present”; (furthermore) in (such a) performance, various facets of love are acted out.

33. The *dhruvābhinaya* which functions (in this context) is exactly of the nature of the *aṅkurābhinaya* (the *abhinaya* that follows speech), (and this is so) on account of the consideration (*ālōcana-vaśāt*) of appropriate organic continuity (*paurvāparya*); therefore, though not possessing the substantiality of ‘realistic’ drama, yet the (mimed) ‘play’, created, as if miraculously (*kākatālīya*), in the imagination (of the spectators) by acting out the meaning of the verse being sung (*dhruvā*), ‘reflects’ reality (*upāṁśu-rūpa*), and is as effective as ‘realistic’ acting; in this manner, the *śārīrābhinaya* [that is, the total, combined and interrelated effect of acting – through the instrument of the actor’s body – employing *sāttvika*, *vācika*, and *āṅgika*] gives rise to metadrama, and it is this which is described (by Bharata) in the verse: “*Sthānē dhruvābhinayō yaḥ kriyatē . . .*”, etc. [*NŚ* 22.49]. 34. The abhinaya employed by those performers whose hearts are taken possession of by *bhāvas*, that is, by the *vyabhicāri-rasas* (the subordinate *rasas*), along with their latent faculties (*sthayīs*), and who with absolute concentration are determined to capture those *bhāvas* (in the form of *abhinaya*) – that is called

abhinaya done through *dhruvās* (*dhruvāsu*) or *dhruvā-yōga-abhinaya*. 35. How (do they do it)? – (the answer is,) through an interrelated combination (*paraspara-milana* [cf. line 27]), as if miraculously (*kākatālīya-vaśāt*). 36. The 'play' (*abhinaya*) which results from it is (called) 'metadrama' (*nāṭyāyita*). 37. Is there 'dramatization' (*abhinayatā*) at every step? – "No", says he (Bharata); (various forms of) 'dramatization' come out of the *aṅga-upāṅga-sattvas* (*sattvas* = essences) embodying, Happiness, Sorrow, Anger, etc., which are suggestive of (those various forms [*sthayī-bhāvas*] of the inner) 'drama' – this is what (the ślōka) means. 38. Why (does he) say "*tad-api*"? – (the answer is:) "not only the earlier one [ślōka 48], but also this [ślōka 49]."

> 39-40. *The meaning in the speech of one character pantomimically reacted to by another character is* 'Nivṛttyaṅkura'. [*NŚ* 22.50]

41. Anticipating (a question as to) how (one should) describe (the link between) the speech (*vākyam*) of one (character) and the *sūcābhinaya* of another (character) – the *sūcābhinaya* involving all parts of the body (*aṅgōpāṅga* and *sattva*) in related order, revealing the mental activity of that character – (Bharata) makes a statement of clarification ('*hētum-āha*', beginning with the question:) "*Tat-saṁbandhaṁ katham* . . ." ("How are the two [*vākya* and *abhinaya*] related?"): as the coming out of a sprout (*aṅkura*) is revealed in the disappearance (*nivṛtti*) of the seed, so also the sprouting (*aṅkura*) of that (the sūcābhinaya) is revealed in the disappearance (nivṛtti) of speech (vākya) – (and this) is called 'nivṛttyaṅkura'. 42. As, for example, when the Vidūṣaka asks the King of Vatsa (– Udayana – about the painted portrait of Sāgarikā:) "Does what you see please you?"; and Sāgarikā (who is hiding, and overhears, and does not know how the king is going to answer) says (in an aside), "I feel, indeed, that I am standing between life and death." Then the king says (to the Vidūṣaka), "Need you ask if it pleases me?". 43. And (the king then) recites (the verse): "With difficulty (*kṛcchrēṇa*), (my eyes) running across (*vyatītya*) (her) pair of thighs (*ūruyugaṁ*), for a long time (*sucirāt*) . . .", etc. [– a verse which expresses a frank appreciation of Sāgarikā's physical beauty!]. 44. If (one) listened to this (conversation), in its ordered progression (*tasmin kramēṇākarṇyamānē*), (one) would see, in Sāgarikā, (her) reaction (*parispandaḥ*), which (as the sprout) is the outer, visible manifestation of the inner state (*vyabhicāri-sattva*) of her feelings of doubt and anxiety, born out of the love welling up (*udgama*) in her – an emotional reaction which involves all parts of (her) body (*sattvāṅgōpāṅga*) – in this way, *nivṛttyaṅkura* as well as metadrama (*nāṭyāyita*) is seen at every step (*prati-padaṁ*) in the (play,) "Vāsavadattā-Nāṭyadhāra".

7

'Rudra'*

Starting with the title of the farce, *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*, we note that it represents a union of two of the main characters of the play: the Bhagavan, who is a parivrājaka (a mendicant sannyāsi-yōgi), and Ajjukā (a courtesan). This union is farcically consummated in the play when the Bhagavan uses his yogic power to transfer his soul from his body into that of the Courtesan, who has just died of a snake bite. This union is also farcically replicated when the Messenger of Death, who on learning that he has taken the soul of the wrong person, returns to earth to set things right, and, on finding that the Bhagavan's soul is occupying the young woman's body, places the soul of the Courtesan in the agèd body of the Bhagavan.

Rudra is the deity invoked in the opening hymn (Nāndī ślōka) of the *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*:

Tvāṁ pātu lakṣaṇāḍhyaḥ sura-vara-mukuṭēndra-cāru-maṇi-ghṛṣṭaḥ |
Rāvaṇa-namitāṅguṣṭhō Rudrasya sadārcitaḥ pādaḥ ||1||[1]

Of excellent attributes, being rubbed by the beautiful gem
In the crown of the foremost of gods, Indra's diadem,
And having the big toe which crushed Rāvaṇa, too,
May the ever-worshipped foot of Rudra protect you!

We would like to point out that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* records the birth of Rudra, springing forth from the forehead of Brahmā, in the form of Ardhanārīśvara (the androgynous form of Śiva combining him [right half] with his consort, Umā [left half]):

Bhrakuṭī-kuṭilāt-tasya lalāṭāt-krōdha-dīpitāt |
Sam-utpannas-tadā Rudrō madhyāhnārka-sama-prabhaḥ ||12||
Ardha-nārī-nara-vapuḥ pracaṇḍôti-śarīravān |
Vibhajātmānam-ity-uktvā taṁ brahmântardadhē tataḥ ||13||[2]

To him (*Brahmā*)*, whose forehead was inflamed with anger and whose brow was knit, was, then, born Rudra, who was equal to the midday sun in splendor. That Rudra was, in body, half female and half male. He was terrible and gigantic. Telling him, "Divide yourself", Brahmā then disappeared.*

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The background of Rudra's birth is as follows. In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā, the Primeval Creator, had created four sages to help him with the further work of creation. But because they were stubbornly refusing to obey him and did not procreate, Brahmā became impatient and angry with them. He, therefore, seated himself in a yōgic trance, and it was then that Rudra(-Ardhanārī) was born out of his terrible anger, springing forth from his forehead.

The author, Mahēndra, has caricatured this episode in his play, *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*, when he has the main character, the Bhagavan (Parivrājaka/Mendicant), in the frustration of suppressed anger with *his* rebellious disciple, sit down, and in a yōgic trance, create out of *his* anger, his own 'Ardhanārī' form by transferring his soul into the body of the Courtesan!

The *dhvani* of Rudra as Śiva-Ardhanārīśvara is, thus, experienced at a farcical level in the play, *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*, by the double union of the Bhagavan and Ajjukā (his soul in her body, and her soul in his body), and, therefore, Mahēndra's play can be viewed as a parody of the above myth of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

King Mahēndra, in addressing his invocatory hymn to the god Rudra(-Ardhanārī), is only following the three-fold example of Kālidāsa. The Nāndī ślōkas of all three of Kālidāsa's plays are addressed to Śiva/Rudra in his Ardhanārī form. Kālidāsa makes explicit the Ardhanārīśvara form of Rudra in the Nāndīs of *Mālavikāgnimitra* and *Vikramōrvaśī*, and, more subtly, in that of *Abhijñāna-Śākuntala*.

There is a tradition in India that one should pay homage to one's mother, father, guru, and one's god. King Mahēndra has cleverly done all of this in the Nāndī ślōka of the *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*.

According to the surface level meaning of the Nāndī ślōka, the 'foremost of the gods' ('*suravara*' – that is, Indra, the King of the gods) shows his devotion to Śiva and Śiva's consort, Umā, by bowing his head at the foot of Rudra-Ardhanārī. But since King Mahēndra is named after the god Indra – the Great Indra, the word '*suravara*' in the Nāndī also brings to mind the image of King Mahēndra, the poet-author, bowing his head at the foot of Rudra-Ardhanārī. We, thus, mention Mahēndra's homage to the divine couple, first.

Second, Mahēndra's father, King Siṁhaviṣṇu, according to historical record, conquered the Kaḷabhra, Malaya, Chōḷa, and Pāṇḍya kings, *and also the Siṁhaḷa* [Sri Lankan] *king who was proud of the strength of his arms*.[3] With this context in mind, it is easy to grasp another level of *dhvani* in the Nāndī ślōka: the fierce Rudra, at this implied level, is his father, Siṁhaviṣṇu, who crushed the historical Sri Lankan king (the *alter ego* of Rāvaṇa), just as the god Rudra crushed Rāvaṇa of the epics. And, with Rudra's Ardhanārīśvara form in mind, we can understand that Mahēndra is bowing at the foot of his mother at the same time that he bows at his father's foot!

Third, we know from Mahēndra's famous musical inscription at Kuḍumiyāmalai that the name of his music guru was Rudra Āchārya! Thus, at a third level of implied meaning, the Nāndī ślōka of *Bhagavad-Ajjuka* portrays Mahēndra paying homage to his guru: Rudra Āchārya. As Rāvaṇa, Lord Rāma's antagonist, was renowned as a great musician, the Nāndī ślōka suggests, at this level, that the ever-worshipped foot of Rudra Āchārya humbled even Rāvaṇa (i.e., his guru's genius surpassed that of the legendary Rāvaṇa). And let us not forget the feminine 'better half' of Mahēndra's guru: Rudra Āchārya's wife! With the god Rudra's Ardhanārīśvara form as a paradigm, we can understand that Mahēndra was also bowing at the foot of his guru's wife.

Fourth, going by Bharata's rule that the Nāndī should hint at some of the characters in the play, the word 'Rudra' in the Nāndī ślōka can also be taken to suggest two of the main characters of the play, the *noisy*[4] and often *angry* Parivrājaka (Mendicant) and his better half, *the Courtesan*! This composite caricature of Ardhanārīśvara (the Bhagavan's soul in the Courtesan's body) is duplicated, as we have seen, and given a further twist in the 'hermaphrodite' formed by the Courtesan's soul implanted in the Bhagavan's body! In this context, the '*suravara*' (plural) who bow down to this Mendicant/Courtesan 'Rudra-Ardhanārī' may be visualized as the 'foremost of the gods'. (It is said that gods and demons, animate and inanimate beings bow down before a sannyāsin who attains knowledge of the inmost Self.) That the Mendicant/Courtesan 'Rudra-Ardhanārī' should attract such honor from the foremost gods is a farcical idea. In this way, the farcical element, as the seed (bīja) of its comedy, is introduced in the Nāndī ślōka of *Bhagavad-Ajjuka*. This seed lies completely hidden at this earliest stage of the play. However, as the drama progresses, the connoisseur will be able to grasp the significance of this seminal *dhvani*.

As the root of the name 'Rāvaṇa' is traditionally taken as 'rāva' (to make a big noise), this name, with regard to the context of the play proper, may felicitously suggest the Mendicant's disciple, Shāṇḍilya, who makes plenty of noise: crying out in fear when he mistakes a peacock for a tiger and, later, bewailing the death of the Courtesan.

Notes

1. See our translation of the whole play in Part Two of this book.
2. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* Pt. 1, Canto 7.
3. *South-Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. 2, p. 356, v. 20.
4. Cf. Rudra-Praśna, the 5th hymn of the 4th Vaiśvadēva-Kāṇḍa of the Taittrīya Saṁhitā of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur-Vēda*:

   Nama uccai-ghōṣāyâkrandayatē |

   Salutations to the One who roars at the top of his voice!

8

Mask and Metatheater[1]

Ēkaṁ sat viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti |
Brāhmins call the One Reality by different names.
– *Ṛg Vēda*

Tam-asya lōka-yantrasya sūtradhāraṁ pracakṣatē |
Pratibandhābhy-anujñābhyāṁ tēna viśvaṁ vibhajyatē ||[2]

It is said, He is the Sūtradhāra of, and *is* Himself, this Lōka-yantra
(perpetual motion machine – the Universe).

He, in the form of the Cosmos, divides Himself through disintegration
(into the many) and re-integration (of the many, while remaining One).
– *Bhartṛhari*

Although the common meaning of the word 'mask' relates to a physical object held in front of the face, Bhartṛhari's verse touches the ultimate, philosophical heart of the term. The English word 'mask' is related to the Sanskrit word 'maskaraḥ'. According to Pāṇini, 'maskaraḥ' has the root meaning of 'to go, to move, from place to place, from one stage to another, from one form to another'. The physical mask does do this, but the whole art of theater does it again and again in many different ways. For instance, Bharata says:

Yathā jīvas-svabhāvaṁ hi parityajyānya-dēhikam |
Para-bhāvaṁ prakurutē para-bhāvaṁ samāśritaḥ || 7 ||

Ēvaṁ budhaḥ paraṁ bhāvaṁ sôsmīti manasā smaran |
Tāha vāgaṅga-lōlābhiś-cēṣṭābhis-tu samācarēt || 8 ||[3]

Just as a man who renounces his own nature and body and assumes another's
nature by entering into his body [a yogic power], so the wise actor, thinking
within himself "I am he" ["*sôsmi*"], should represent the states of another
person by speech, gesture, and other aspects [i.e., dress and expression of nature].
– *Nāṭya-Śāstra*

King Mahēndravarman, the Pallava monarch who ruled south India from around A.D. 580 to 630, was the author of *Bhagavadajjuka* and *Mattavilāsa*, the earliest extant farcical comedies in Indian literature. The opening hymn of invocation, the Nāndī ślōka, at the very beginning of the *Mattavilāsa*, spells out the four traditional layers of Mask in acting:

Bhāṣā-vēṣa-vapuḥkriyā-guṇa-kṛtān-āśritya bhēdān gataṁ
Bhāvā-vēśa-vaśād-anēka-rasatāṁ trailōkya-yātrā-mayam |
Nrttaṁ niṣprati-baddha-bōdha-mahimā yaḥ prēkṣakaś-ca svayaṁ
Sa vyāptāvani-bhājanaṁ diśatu vō divyaḥ kapālī yaśaḥ ||1||[4]

Through the different modes of speech, dress,
bodily action, and expression of nature,
The representation of various emotions brought on by the
arousal of the power of primal feelings,
May that resplendent Kapālī of unopposed, omniscient surpremacy,
who's the performer and spectator Himself of His own dance,
The manifold march of evolution of the three worlds,
grant you His world-bowl-filling glory! (1)

The four expressions in this Nāndī ślōka, 1) '*bhāṣa*', 2) '*vēṣa*', 3) '*vapuḥkriyā ...*', and 4) '*guṇa ...*', suggest Bharata's four masking elements of acting: *vācika*, *āhārya*, *āṅgika*, and *sāttvika* (speech, costumes, bodily movements, and expressions of emotion).

There is another type of transformation which may be viewed as a mask. We have argued that, originally, the Sūtradhāra was physically present throughout a Sanskrit play.[5] He, first, recited the Nāndī ślōka, then, as the Sthāpaka, he introduced the play with an assistant actress or actor. Next, he assumed the principal male role in the play proper. And, finally, he recited the closing hymn of benediction, the Bharatavākyam. This is role within role. Each new role is a new mask.

The progression (movement – *maskara*) here is as follows: a flesh and blood actor assumes, first, the role (mask) of the 'Nāndī'-Sūtradhāra and recites the invocatory ślōka; then, he (the 'Nāndī'-Sūtradhāra) assumes the role (mask) of the Sthāpaka (the Introducer of the play); next, the Sūtradhāra-Sthāpaka assumes the role (mask) of the chief male character (the Hero) of the play proper; and, finally, the Hero and Sthāpaka roles (masks) are shed when the flesh and blood actor reverts to his primary role (mask) of the 'bharata' (the 'chief actor' – the Sūtradhāra) and recites the closing benediction, the Bharatavākyam.

In the *Bhagavadajjuka*, the Sūtradhāra-Sthāpaka (a truly competent teacher)[6] takes up the task of teaching his assistant, the Vidūṣaka, what the Farcical Comedy is. The play proper is the Sūtradhāra-Sthāpaka's vehicle of instruction. And the main role of the Parivrājaka (a wandering mendicant), as a subtly fraudulent teacher trying to instruct his rebellious, unwilling student, is his mask. The role of the unwilling student, Shāṇḍilya, is the mask of the Vidūṣaka.

In the previous studies, we have maintained that these various layers (masks) in the progressive development of the play can be viewed as various layers of metatheater. In this sense, the mask is ubiquitous! A pun is a mask. The layers of suggestiveness in *dhvani* are masks.

There is yet one more kind of mask – a very subtle one. Much of the Upaniṣadic, Bhagavad-Gītā, Sāṅkhya, and Yōga phraseology used by the Parivrājaka in preaching, as it were, a high morality and philosophy to his wayward disciple, actually has an earthy, sensuous, secondary level of meaning. On the surface, we have pompous religious preaching. This dialogue, however, has an inner meaning which is couched in the language of a 'detached' courtesan. The Parivrājaka, who would put on the appearance of asceticism, thus reveals his un-ascetic thoughts within. The paradox of the 'courtesan' within the sanyāsi and its converse, the 'sanyāsi' within the courtesan,

are made physically explicit in the play, *Bhagavadajjuka*, when the Parivrājaka, by means of his yogic power, injects his soul into the body of the Courtesan, who has just died of a snake bite, and, again, when the Messenger of Death, having taken the soul of the wrong woman, returns to earth and places the Courtesan's soul in the vacant body of the Parivrājaka!

Finally, to help clarify and illustrate the puzzling passage in the Nāndī of the *Mattavilāsa*, which states that the Supreme Lord is "the performer and spectator Himself of His own dance, the manifold march of evolution of the three worlds", we would like to analyze how the characters of the play, *Bhagavadajjuka*, may be understood as emanating from the Formless One, the Unmanifest Reality, through the mask of its highest manifestation, Rudra(-Ardhanārīśvara), the deity invoked in the play's Nāndī ślōka. From this deity can be understood to emerge the mask of the Sūtradhāra and his implicit better half (the chief actress, who plays the part of the Courtesan in the play proper), both of whom then assume the two comical 'Ardhanārī' roles (the mask of the Parivrājaka who is a "courtesan" at heart and the mask of the Courtesan who is a "sanyāsi" at heart); and these two 'Ardhanārīs' attain a ridiculous explicitness when the Courtesan's body incarnates the Parivrājaka's soul and the Parivrājaka's body incarnates the Courtesan's soul.

The diagrams on the next two pages will illustrate how all of the other characters of this play may also be viewed as comical chips off the Eternally-old Block. These characters include the mixed-up Messenger of Death, the quack of a Doctor, and the Courtesan's lover-boy, Rāmilaka, her Mother, and her two Maid-Servants. In the diagrams, the various forms of Śiva's half of Rudra-Ardhanārīśvara on the male side are balanced by the goddess's half of Rudra-Ardhanārīśvara on the female side. These are divine forms, representing *perfection* in each aspect. The characters of the play are, more or less, ridiculous, degenerate semblances of them.

BHAGAVAD-AJJUKAM
(BHAGAVĀN + ĀRYAKĀ)

I. Title:

BHAGAVĀN	ĀRYAKĀ
The ideal, Perfect Male	The ideal, Perfect Female
PARIVRĀJAKA	AJJUKĀ
In the play, a less than perfect ascetic! he falls a victim to the temptations of the erotic.	In the play, a courtesan; she comes to possess the soul of an ascetic.

Bhagavad-Ajjukam

1) The Heretic Ascetic
\+
2) The Ascetic Heretic

II. Nāndī Ślōka:

NEUTER (the Farcical, the Laughable)
RUDRA = Ardha-Nārī-Nara-Vapuḥ

PARIVRĀJAKA — AJJUKĀ

(A union of the two is hinted at by the two lines of the Nāndī ślōka joined together in one verse)

		PARIVRĀJAKA	AJJUKĀ	
(*Sūtradhāra* & ***Parivrājaka***)	1.	Parama-Guru	Parama-Guru	(***Gaṇikā****'s* body+*Parivrājaka's* soul)
(*Parivrājaka*)	2.	Yōgēśvaraḥ	Yōgēśvarī	(ditto)
(*Parivrājaka*)	3.	Mahēśvara(-vyākarana)	Mahēśvarī	(ditto)
(*Parivrājaka* & ***Vidūṣaka***)	4.	Vṛṣabhēśvaraḥ	Vṛṣabhēśvarī	(ditto)
(*Parivrājaka* & ***Yamapuruṣa***)	5.	Mahā-Kālaḥ	Mahā-Kālī	(ditto)
(*Parivrājaka* & ***Vaidya***)	6.	Vaidyanāthaḥ	Vaidyēśvarī	(ditto)
Parivrājaka & ***Rāmilaka***)	7.	Kāmēśvaraḥ	Kāmēśvarī	(*Gaṇikā*–and her two ***Maids***, too)
(*Rāmilaka*)	8.	Sundarēśvaraḥ	Sundarēśvarī	(ditto)
(*Parivrājaka*)	9.	Parama-Pitā	Parama-Mātā	(***Mātā***, the *Gaṇikā's* 'mother')

III. Prastāvanā Statement:

PRAHASANA
(The most important Rasa is the Hāsya Rasa –
Life is a Farcical Comedy!)

IV. Play Proper:

1. a) Ślōka – two prominent themes:
   i) Medicine & ii) Religion
   The two characters are introduced in order of their importance:
   i) Teacher-Doctor & ii) Disciple-Patient
   b) Entrance of the Mendicant
   c) Entrance of the Disciple
2. a) Treatment of the theme of Medicine
   b) Treatment of the theme of Religion
3. Illustration by Parivrājaka – real identities revealed, *unmasked*
   (The audience understands the 'masks' for what they are!)

The Nāndī Ślōka of the play, *Bhagavadajjuka*:

SŪTRADHĀRAḤ:

Tvāṁ pātu lakṣaṇāḍhyaḥ sura-vara-mukuṭēndra-cāru-maṇi-ghṛṣṭaḥ |
Rāvaṇa-namitāṅguṣṭhō rudrasya sadārcitaḥ pādaḥ ||1||

Of excellent attributes, being rubbed by the beautiful gem
In the crown of the foremost of gods, Mahēndra's diadem,

And having the big toe which crushed Rāvaṇa, too.
May the ever-worshipped foot of Rudra protect you! (1)

Rudra = Ardhanārīśvara (male/female: hermaphrodite) derived from the Unmanifest Reality.[7] (Of the latter nothing can be predicated.)

Śabda-rūpaṁ yad-akhilaṁ dhattē sarvasya vallabhā |
Artha-rūpaṁ yad-akhilaṁ dhattē mugdhēndu-śēkharaḥ || – *Śiva-Purāṇa*

All that is in the form of words comes from (his) beloved (Umā).
All that in the form of meaning comes from the Moon-crested-one (Śiva). [Ardhanārīśvara concept]

Nityaḥ śabdārtha-saṁbandhaḥ |
Word and meaning are one eternally inseparable unit. [Ardhanārīśvara concept]

In the play, *Bhagavadajjuka*, all of the characters (both explicit and implied) devolve from the Supreme Deity, Rudra-Ardhanārīsvara, who in turn has devolved (mythically) from the Primeval Creator, Brahmā, and Brahmā, from the Unmanifest Source of all:

1. On the (right) male side, the **Rudra**-side of Ardhanārīśvara – his various manifestations:
   1) Dakṣiṇāmūrtiḥ (Parama-Guru, the god who teaches without speaking!)
      [First, the **SŪTRADHĀRA**, who speaks! – then, the **PARIVRĀJAKA**, who rants!]
   2) Yōgēśvaraḥ (the ascetic Lord of Yōga) [> **PARIVRĀJAKA**]
   3) Mahēśvara(-vyākarana) (the divine Source of all grammar) [**PARIVRĀJAKA**]
   4) Vṛṣabhēśvaraḥ (the Great Jester) [> **SŪTRADHĀRA** > **PARIVRĀJAKA**; **VIDŪṢAKA** > **ŚĀṆḌILYA**; **YAMAPURUṢA** > **VAIDYA**]
   5) Mahā-Kālaḥ (Lord of Death) [> **YAMAPURUṢA** > **VAIDYA**]
   6) Vaidyanāthaḥ (Lord of Medics) [> **SŪTRADHĀRA** > **PARIVRĀJAKA**; **YAMAPURUṢA** > **VAIDYA**]
   7) Kāmēśvaraḥ (the Lord of Love) [> **SŪTRADHĀRA** > **PARIVRĀJAKA**; **RĀMILAKA**]
   8) Sundarēśvaraḥ (the Handsome Lord) [> **RĀMILAKA**]
   9) Parama-Pitā (Supreme Father) [> **SŪTRADHĀRA** > **PARIVRĀJAKA**]

2. On the (left) female side, the **Umā**-side of Ardhanārīśvara – her various manifestations:
   1) Parama-Guru [> **GAṆIKĀ** – with the Parivrājaka's soul inside her body]
   2) Yōgēśvarī (Supreme Goddess of Yōga) [ditto]
   3) Mahēśvarī (the divine Source of all grammar) [ditto]
   4) Vṛṣabhēśvarī (the Great Jester) [ditto]
   5) Mahā-Kālī (the Great Destroyer) [ditto]
   6) Vaidyēśvarī (the Deity of Doctors) [ditto]
   7) Kāmēśvarī (the Goddess of Love) [> **GAṆIKĀ**]
   8) Tripura-Sundarēśvarī (the Goddess of Beauty) [> **GAṆIKĀ** > the two **MAIDS**]
   9) Parama-Mātā (Supreme Mother) [> **MĀTĀ**]

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper we read on January 24, 1996, at the 'International Seminar on Mask and Performance' held in Madras at the Alliance Française.
2. Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīyam*, Trivandrum Series No. 116, edited by K. Sāmbaśiva Śāstri (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1935), Kālasamuddēśa: 4th ślōka.
3. *Nāṭyashāstra*, edited by Madhusudan Shastri (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1981), xxvi: 7 & 8.
4. Line 1 of the text of King Mahēndravarman's play, *Mattavilāsa*. See our translation of the whole play, in Part Two of this book.
5. See our essay, "Sanskrit Drama – Its Continuity of Structure", the first essay in this book.
6. His competancy, however, paradoxically embraces the seeds of farcical incompetance!
7. Kālidāsa, in his *Raghu-Vaṁśa* (I.1), regards Śiva and Pārvatī as inseparable as *śabda* and *artha*. In the *Vāyu-Purāṇa-Saṁhitā*, it is said that Pārvatī is the form of all words (*śabda*) and Śiva is the form of all meanings (*artha*):

   Śabda-jataṁ-aśēṣaṁ tu dhattē śarvasya vallabhā |
   Artha-rūpam yad-akhilaṁ dhattē mugdhēndu-śēkharaḥ ||

9
Traivikramam
A Dramatic Guide to the Trivikrama Panel, Māmallapuram*

Introduction

M. Krishnamachariar, in the 22nd chapter of his monumental *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (1937, pp. 689-691), has transcribed the text of a short dramatic work entitled *Traivikramam*. As far as we are aware, this three-page jewel of a play has remained untranslated into English – though, of course, Krishnamachariar has given a brief summary of it in his book. Surprisingly, neither he nor anyone else seems to have noticed the extremely close resemblance the play's painted panel (as vividly described by the Sūtradhāra) has to the Trivikrama panel of the Varāha-II cave-temple at Māmallapuram.

Having written our own guide-book on the monuments of Māmallapuram (1993),[1] we were perhaps understandably well-prepared to appreciate the close correspondence between the cave-temple's Trivikrama panel and the painted panel (*citra-paṭa*) which is graphically delineated, and whose story is narrated in the dialogue of the drama, *Traivikramam*.

Note that only two characters appear on stage in this play: the Sūtradhāra and his wife, the Naṭī.[2] And the only required prop on stage is a large painted canvas of the Trivikrama Panel. (The Trivikrama Panel of the Varāha-II cave-temple, Māmallapuram, may be taken as the perfect prototype for any painted rendition on stage.)

The play, itself, is a dramatic narrative. The Sūtradhāra does all the narrating, humorously prodded on repetitively by the Naṭī. The prose narrative is interspersed with ten ślōkas which, originally, the Sūtradhāra would have *sung* in various rāgas. The mythical story of the Vāmana Avatāra (Incarnation) of Lord Vishṇu, which forms the substance of this play, exists thus as a form of narrative- and musical-metadrama (a form of *nāṭyāyita*)[3] in relation to the underlying drama which is acted out on stage by the two actors.

We give below, Krishnamachariar's summary of the plot of the narrative:

> Vāmana appears before Bali, [great-grandson] of Hiraṇyakaśipu at the close of the Aśvamēdha sacrifice performed gloriously by Bali. Bali, as customary, towards the end of any sacrifice was ready to grant any gifts and Vāmana along with Bṛihaspati, the minister of the Dēvas, in mortal coil, appeared before Bali and asked for a piece of land that can be measured by three strides. Bali was ready to grant the request. Samhlāda, his chief minister, pointed out that Vāmana was only Vishṇu in disguise, who killed his [great-grandfather], Hiraṇyakaśipu, the conqueror of three worlds. Bali could not recede from his promise; such a distinguished guest ought to be satisfied; Lakshmī, the goddess of wealth, moves away from the donee to the donor; and he grants Vāmana's request by pouring water into his hands. Suddenly Vāmana grows into a Viśvarūpa, expanding to the corners of the universe. Rākshasas blinded by the Vishṇumāyā fought among themselves taking their brethren for Vishṇu. Thus, most of them perished and Bali was set as the emperor of Pātāla.[4]

Krishnamachariar then quotes M.R. Kavi's remark that if *Traivikramam* "is not the drama of Bhāsa, it may be ascribed to any of the Pallava kings, preferably to Mahēndra-vikrama or Narasiṁha-vishṇu." Unfortunately, Krishnamachariar does not footnote his quotations from Kavi. Surprisingly, neither does Krishnamachariar tell us where he found the text of *Traivikramam*![5] But as he was, otherwise, such a meticulous scholar, we accept the text as is from his pen, suggesting only a few corrections.

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*This chapter (up to the section on the authorship of the play) is based on a paper presented at the American Council for Southern Asian Art's Symposium, XI, on May 8, 2004, at Harvard University.

Text of the Play:

Śrī

Traivikramam

(*Nāndyāntē tataḥ praviśati sūtradhāraḥ saha priyayā* ।)

1 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*****:** *Āryē, tṛtīyē khalu citrapaṭē –*

Daityēndra-mauḷi-maṇi-ghṛṣṭi-kiṇī-kṛtasya
pādasya yasya gaganōdgama-garvitatya ।
Traivikramaṁ tribhuvanātatam-adbhutaṁ yad-
bhūtair-vimuktam-akhilaṁ vaṭu-vāmanasya ॥1॥

Namō bhagavatē vaṭu- vāmanasya । Ārya, tatas- tataḥ ।
2 ***Naṭī*****:** *Ṇamō bha'avadō vaḍu-vāmaṇassa* । *Ayya, tadō tadō* ।

3 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*****:** *Āryē śrūyatāṁ daityēndraṁ baliṁ vairōcanaṁ kṛtāśva-mēdham-avabhṛtha-snātaṁ muktā-jālālaṅ-kṛtōttamāṅgaṁ kṛṣṇājināvalambitōttarīyaṁ patnī-sahitaṁ vara-pradānābhimukhaṁ tri-daśa-gaṇa-bhūta-hitārtham-upādhyāya-rūpaṁ bṛhaspatiṁ puraskṛtya svayaṁ vaṭu-vāmanō bhūtvā vāmadēvyaṁ sāmōdgāya yajña-samṛddhiṁ praśaṁsan-n-upasṛtō bhagavān-mahāviṣṇuḥ* ।

Tatas- tataḥ ।
4 ***Naṭī*****:** *Tadō tadō* ।

5 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*****:** *Tatas-taṁ dṛṣṭvaiva prahlādita-manasā balināpy-abhihitaṁ vṛṇīśva varam-iti* ।

Tatas- tataḥ ।
6 ***Naṭī*****:** *Tadō tadō* ।

7 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*****:** *Tata ājñāpayan-n-iva mama gurōr-yajña-karaṇārthaṁ trīn vikramān-icchāmīty-uktaṁ bhagavatā* ।

Tatas- tataḥ ।
8 ***Naṭī*****:** *Tadō tadō* ।

9 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*****:** *Tata aiśvarya-mada-garvitēna tēnāpy-avicārya-māṇēna bāḍhaṁ dadāmīty-uktaṁ balinā* ।

Tatas- tataḥ ǀ

10 ***Naṭī*: *Tadō tadō*** ǀ

11 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:** *Tatō lakṣaṇair-vimala-viśāla-buddhi-hṛdayēna samhlāda-nāmnāmātyēna vāritaṁ na dātavyam-iti* ǀ

Ayaṁ sa viṣṇur-manasāpy-ajēyaḥ surāsurāṇāṁ sukha-śōka-kartā ǀ
Vaṭuś-ca nāyaṁ sakalaṁ vijētuṁ prāptō yadi syān-na jalaṁ pradēyaḥ ǁ2ǁ

Api ca –

Bhitvā guruṁ tava jaghāna nṛsiṁha-rūpī
vakṣa-sthalaṁ nakha-mukhair-niśitaiḥ purā yaḥ ǀ
Sākṣāddhiraṇyakaśipuṁ sura-daitya-nāthaṁ
prāptākhilājita-vara-pravaraṁ viriñcāt ǁ3ǁ

Ity-uktaḥ samhlādēna ǀ

Tatas- tataḥ ǀ

12 ***Naṭī*:** *Tadō tadō* ǀ

13 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:** *Tataḥ –*

Sôyaṁ yadi syād-ahi-bhōga-śāyī śārṅgāsi-cakrōd-gada-śaṅkha-pāniḥ ǀ
Yuddhēśvasahyō yadi yācatē māṁ dāsyāmi satya-vratam-āsthitôham ǁ4ǁ

Api caitad-uktaṁ balinā –

Dēhīti yō vadati taṁ praviśaty-alakṣmīr-
nāstīti yō vadati taṁ punar-abhy-upaiti ǀ
Tasmād-dadāmi pṛthivīṁ madhusūdanāya
śrīr-ēva maṁ bhajatu taṁ praviśatv-alakṣmīḥ ǁ5ǁ

Ity-ēvam-uktvā visarjitaḥ samhlādō balinā ǀ

Tatas- tataḥ ǀ

14 ***Naṭī*:** *Tadō tadō* ǀ

15 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:** *Tataḥ khara-mura-naraka-namuci-prabhṛtibhir-vāryamāṇaḥ pratārya māṇas-tānstān-nirbhartsyātmanaḥ satya-vacanam-ēvāsthāyāsura-gaṇahita-karābhyāṁ sura-gaṇāhita-karābhyāṁ karābhyāṁ jāmbūnadamayaṁ bhṛṅgāram-ādāya ita itō bhagavān-yathēṣṭaṁ tōyaṁ gṛhāṇēty-uktaṁ balinā* ǀ

Tatas- tataḥ ǀ

16 ***Naṭī*:** *Tadō tadō* ǀ

17 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:** *Tataḥ sura-gaṇa-hita-karē asura-gaṇa-nidhana-karē amala-kamala-dala-sadṛśē tasmin kara-talē prasṛta-mātrē tōyē dvi-guṇa-caturbhir-dōrbhir-alaṅkṛtya trailōkya-pramāṇaṁ pravijṛmbhitō bhagavān divya-mūrtiḥ* ǀ

Tatas- tataḥ ǀ

18 ***Naṭī*:** *Tadō tadō* ǀ

19 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:** *Tatō vivṛta-vadana-daṣṭauṣṭha-bhrakuṭī-puṭa-viṣamī-kṛta-rakta-nayanāḥ sasaṁrambham-aham-ahamikayā samutthitā daityēndra-saṅghāḥ* ǀ

Tatas- tataḥ |

20 ***Naṭī*: *Tadō tadō* |

21 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*: *Tatas-tat-tējasaiva tvaṁ viṣṇur-ayaṁ viṣṇur-anyōnyaṁ prahṛtya naṣṭā daityāḥ, hṛṣṭā dēvāḥ, āhatā dēva-dundubhayaḥ, aty-uddhūtā vāyavaḥ, ati-tapati-smādityaḥ, patitā vṛkṣāḥ, bhrāntā mēghāḥ, śāntaṁ-iva nabhaḥ, skhalitāḥ parvatāḥ, kṣubhitāḥ sāgarāḥ pralīnā vāsuki-prabhṛtayō bhujaṅgēśvarāḥ* | *Kiṁ nu khalv-idam* –

Pralayam-idam-upētaṁ kiṁ nu māyā na vidmaḥ
prabhur-avatu harir-nō hanta hā hā hatāḥ smaḥ |
Iti vividha-nimittair-mōham-abhy-āgatās-tē
bhuvana-patim-upēndraṁ sarva-lōkāḥ praṇēmuḥ ||6||

Tatas- tataḥ |

22 ***Naṭī*: *Tadō tadō* |

23 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*:**

Nārāyaṇāya harayē mura-śāsanāya
trailōkya-janma-laya-pālana-kāraṇāya |
Dēvāya daitya-mathanāya jagaddhitāya
viśvambharā-hita-karāya namôcyutāya ||7||

Ity-uktvā praṇipatitāni sarva-bhūtāni |

Tatas- tataḥ |

24 ***Naṭī*: *Tadō tadō* |

25 ***Sūtradhāraḥ*: *Viṣṇōr-vijayaṁ vijayam-ity-uktvā trīn lōkāṁs-tris-sapta-kṛtvaḥ bhērīṁ praharan paryaṭa-j-jāmbavān* |

Darpāndhaḥ pāda-lagnō namucir-apasṛtō yātyēva gaganaṁ
samhlādaḥ pāda-yōgād-upala iva girēr-bhūmau nipatitaḥ |
Niṣṭhaiṣā yasya bhūmiḥ sa-giri-vana-purā dattaiva calitā
dharma-jñaḥ satyasandhaḥ sukṛta iva balir-dhairyān-na calati ||8||

Api ca –

Svargaṁ surēndra iva dattam-anēka-bhāgaṁ
pātālam-ētya sutalaṁ hariṇā sa daityaḥ |
Bhaktyārcayan paramayā ramatē vibhaktaṁ
kiṁ vā karōti mahatā na samāśrayôyam ||9||

Ramaṇīyaḥ khalu kathāyōgaḥ anyaṁ citra- paṭaṁ varṇayatv- āryaḥ |

26 ***Naṭī*: *Ramaṇijjō khu kahajō'ō, aṁnaṁ citta-paḍaṁ vaṇṇēdu ayyō* |

[27 **Sūtradhāraḥ:**]

Āryē bāḍhaṁ hari-pada-kathā sēyam-antaṁ prayātā
bhaktir-bhūyāt-tava ca mama ca śrīdhara-syāṅghri-padmē |
Naśyatv-ēvaṁ duritam-asakṛt-paśyatāṁ nṛtyatāṁ naḥ
svasthō rājāpy-avatu vasudhāṁ svasti gō-brāḥmaṇēbhyaḥ ||10||

(*Traivikramaṁ samāptam* |)

Śrī

The Three-Strides

(*After the Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra then enters with his beloved*)

1 **Sūtradhāra:** Dear, now in the third painted panel,

> Made callous by the rubbing of the Demon-King's crest jewel,
> the wonderful Foot of young bachelor Vāmana, rising high in the sky,
> Measuring with three strides the Three Worlds,
> is free from the influence of all evil spirits. ||1||

2 **Naṭī:** Salutations to the Bhagavān, young bachelor Vāmana!
Sir, then what?

3 **Sūtradhāra:** Dear, listen! The Demon-King, Bali, son of Virōchana, having performed the ablutions at the end of the Horse-Sacrifice, adorned his head with a string of pearls, and, for an upper garment, wore the skin of a black antelope diagonally across his chest. Then, coming out with his wife, he was looking forward to giving away free gifts. At this time, there came the Bhagavān, Mahā-Vishṇu, who, in order to do the gods a good turn, had assumed the form of the young bachelor Vāmana. With His preceptor Bṛihaspati in front of Him, Himself singing the Sāma hymns of Vāmadēva, and praising the munificent sacrifice, He met the Demon-King, Bali.

4 **Naṭī:** And then?

5 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, highly pleased with Him, Bali said, "Please ask for a boon."

6 **Naṭī:** And then?

7 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, as if commanding the Demon-King, the Bhagavān said, "For my preceptor to perform a ritual sacrifice, I require a piece of land measurable with three strides."

8 **Naṭī:** And then?

9 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, intoxicated with pride in his prosperity, and rather thoughtlessly, the Demon-King said, "I will certainly give it".

10 **Naṭī:** And then?

11 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, the minister named Samhlāda, with penetrating intellect and large-heartedness, halted the Demon-King, telling him, "Don't give! Because,

> "This is that Vishṇu who is unconquerable, doing good to the gods
> and harm to the demons; He is not at all a young bachelor.
> "If, indeed, He has come to take away all your prosperity,
> then you should not give Him the water of consecration!" ||2||

And, also,

> "Assuming the form of Narasiṁha, He, with arrow-sharp claws,
> tore apart the chest of your great-grandfather, Hiraṇyakaśipu,
> "Supreme lord of gods and demons, who had obtained
> from Brahmā a boon of invincibility!" ||3||

12 **Naṭī:** And then?

13 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, [King Bali replied,]

"If He is the One who reclines on the serpent's body, who holds the Śārṅga Bow,
Sword, Discus, uplifted Club, and Conch, who is unbearable in battle –

"If, indeed, He asks me, then I, who am committed to the vow of truth,
will certainly give what He has asked of me." ||4||

And, again, Bali said,

"Bad Luck will, indeed, take possession of one who says 'Give';
Bad Luck, alike, will take possession of one who says 'I don't have';

"Therefore, I shall give away the world to Madhusūdana.
Let Śrī serve me and Bad Luck take possession of Him." ||5||

Thus saying, Bali dismissed Samhlāda.

14 **Naṭī:** And then?

15 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, Khara, Mura, Naraka, Namuchi, and other demons who tried to prevent him were disregarded and rebuked by Bali, who stood by his truthful word. Then, with his arms, which he had till then been using to do good to demons and harm to gods, holding a vessel made of finest gold extracted from the river Jambu, [Bali] said, "Please come here, Bhagavān; accept this water, according to your wish."

16 **Naṭī:** And then?

17 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, the moment the water poured down on [the Bhagavān's] palm – that palm which gratifies gods but deals death blows to demons, and has the splendor of a spotless lotus petal – the divine form of the Bhagavān expanded throughout the Three Worlds and appeared full of power, adorned with eight arms.

18 **Naṭī:** And then?

19 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, now with open mouths, now biting lips, with knitted brows and blood-red eyes, and full of agitated haughtiness, the host sprang up – faithful followers of the Demon-King.

20 **Naṭī:** And then?

21 **Sūtradhāra:** Then, deluded by Vishṇu's dazzling splendor, the demons, crying out, "You are Vishṇu, this is Vishṇu," struck each other in confusion and destroyed themselves. The gods were pleased, divine drums were beaten, the winds whirled, the sun burnt intensely, trees were uprooted, storm-clouds rumbled, the sky seemed to have disappeared, mountains were shaken, the seas, violently agitated, and Vāsuki and other great serpents almost perished! Everyone shouted, "What is this?"

"Is this a deluge or is it Māyā? We do not know!
Alas! Alas! We are finished! May the Supreme Lord Hari protect us!"

Thus deluded by various omens, the whole world sought refuge
in Upēndra, Supreme Lord of the Earth ||6||

22 **Naṭī:** And then?

23 **Sūtradhāra:**

"Salutations to Nārāyaṇa, Hari, the Destroyer of Mura,
Primal Cause of Creation, Protection, and Dissolution of the Three Worlds,

"To God, the Crusher of Demons, Benefactor of the World,
The Indestructible, and the Refuge of all earthly creatures." ||7||

Thus saying, all the creatures prostrated themselves.

24 **Naṭī:** And then?

25 **Sūtradhāra:** **“**Real victory is the victory of Vishṇu”, thus crying out and beating a drum, Jāmbavān encircled the Three Worlds, three times seven times.

Blinded with defiant pride, clinging to Vishṇu’s foot, Namuchi was thrown headlong sky-high; and, grasping at His leg, Samhlāda was rolled down like a boulder from mountain-top!

His once-steady kingdom, along with mountains, forests, towns, moved away when given, but Bali, Knower of Dharma, performer of good deeds, like Satyasandha, never moved from firm resolve. ||8||

Furthermore,

Hari then pushed Bali down to lowest netherworld, Pātāla, but later raised him to Sutala, just as Indra was given Heaven with its variety of pleasures.

Worshipping the Lord with great devotion, Bali enjoys his share – What will not the company of the Great help one to achieve? ||9||

26 **Naṭī:** Charming, indeed, are the threaded elements of your story. Let Sir describe another painted panel.

[27 **Sūtradhāra:***]

Dear, this story of Hari’s Foot has come to an end.
May both you and I devote ourselves to the Lotus Foot of Śrīdhara.

Destroyed, thus, are the many obstacles faced by those who see this acted out.
May our King keep good health, and let cows and Brahmins flourish! ||10||

(Here ends [the drama of] *The Three-Strides*)

At the beginning of this paper we stated that there is a close resemblance between the play's painted panel (*citra-paṭa*), as described by the Sūtradhāra, and the Trivikrama panel of the Varāha-II cave-temple at Māmallapuram.

First, as a visual basis to our discussion, here is a photograph of the cave-temple's panel:

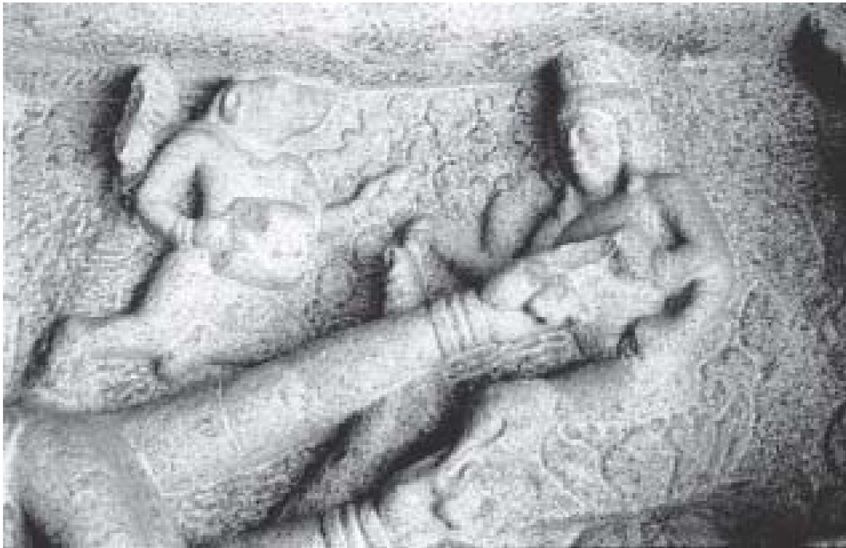


Trivikrama Panel, Varāha-II Cave-Temple, Māmallapuram

We next borrow from our own guide book the following description of the cave-temple's Trivikrama panel:

> The Trivikrama panel depicts Vishṇu as he takes his second stride up through the highest heaven. His left leg soars up well beyond the moon, which is shown here as an anthropomorphic figure being thrust aside at the level of Vishṇu's waist.
>
> On the other side of Vishṇu, at the same level as the moon, there is a figure of the sun, also anthropomorphic. Both the Moon and the Sun gods have large discs carved behind their heads. King Bali and his men are seated on the ground.
>
> In the upper left corner of the panel, above the Sun God, is a small image of Śiva with four arms, seated on a lotus, witnessing Vishṇu's heroic feat.
>
> In the upper right corner is a figure of Brahmā, seated on a lotus, pouring water on Vishṇu's foot. In the mythological account illustrated by this panel, the water poured by Brahmā on Vishṇu's foot becomes the source of the heavenly Gaṅgā.
>
> Between Vishṇu's crown and Brahmā is a figure of Jāmbavān, a bear devotee of Vishṇu, beating a drum in jubilation. Below Brahmā, there is a figure dangling in space.[6]

This figure dangling in space is the demon, Namuchi, according to the play's description.



Jāmbavān and Brahmā



Namuchi

Taking into consideration the various elements depicted in the cave-temple's panel, we began to think that there was, perhaps, a significant relationship between the Trivikrama panel and the Great Penance Panel which is located only a few meters to the east of the cave-temple. As the cave-temple is located just over the crest of the hill, behind the top of the Penance Panel, we could imaginatively link the central cleft of the Penance Panel, as the path of the Descent of the Gaṅgā on earth, with the source of the *Gaṅgāvataraṇa*, the water poured, in heaven, from Brahmā's *kamaṇḍalu* (gourd water-vessel), as portrayed in the cave-temple's Trivikrama panel. From the cave-temple, one can, with a few steps across the crest of the hill, arrive at a shallow, but broad channel carved in the rocky brow of the Penance Panel. This channel for water flowing down from a presumed water storage tank on the hilltop was first noted by A.H. Longhurst in his *Pallava Architecture, Part II*.[7] At the brow of the hill, the channel divides in two directions: water, in the major course, would flow a couple of meters southward and then cascade down in front of the Nāga King and Queen;[8] in the other, smaller course, turning northward, water would flow down the crevasse behind the massive rock of the northern side of the Penance Panel.

In December (2002), at Māmallapuram, while spending some time video-taping children using the Pallava rock-cut children's slide (which, by the way, is the world's oldest extant slide), we noted a regular procession of adults climbing up the steps of the slide, walking in back of the carving of the monkey family to the crevasse opening – not knowing, perhaps, how much farther they could proceed. As it now stands, people can proceed only a few feet beyond the opening. The rubble floor of the narrow crevasse (cemented over, in modern times) rises up at a steep angle till it joins the northern, rock-cut course of the water channel (described in the previous paragraph). When we, ourselves, stood inside the crevasse opening and looked upward, we began to wonder whether, in Pallava times, there was provided a flight of stairs from where we were standing up to the top. Then came to mind the celebrated ślōka of Kālidāsa's *Mēgha-Dūtam* (*The Cloud Messenger*), referring to the Gaṅgā (Jahnu's daughter):

Tasmād-gacchēr-anu-kanakhalaṁ śaila-rājāvatīrṇāṁ
jahnōḥ kanyāṁ sagara-tanaya-svarga-sōpāna-paṅktim |
Gaurī-vaktra-bhrakuṭi-racanāṁ yā vihasyēva phēnaiḥ
śambhōḥ kēśa-grahaṇam-akarōd-indu-lagnōrmi-hastā ||50||

From there, go to Kanakhala, to Jahnu's daughter, descending from the Mountain King,
she who served as a row of steps to heaven for the sons of Sagara,

She who, with rays of the moon as arms, is grasping Śambhu's hair
and, in her bubbling foam, laughing, as it were, at Gaurī's knitted brow. (50)

The following question arose in our minds: Had Kālidāsa's description of the Gaṅgā as "she who served as a row of steps to heaven for the sons of Sagara" inspired the Pallavas to build a flight of stairs up the crevasse from bottom to top? These steps could have been made of brick and mortar – all now reduced to the rubble which has been cemented over, today. Then a happy thought struck us: If the Archaeological Survey of India were to provide a new flight of steps up this crevasse, with a protective railing at the top, for public safety, then, like those of Pallava times, the pilgrims of today, emulating the souls of the 60,000 sons of Sagara climbing up the 'steps' of the Holy Gaṅgā, could climb up these steps to the hill-top above the panel, and then cross over to the Varāha-II cave-temple, where the Trivikrama Panel may be viewed with its portrayal of Brahmā pouring water from his *kamaṇḍalu* on the sacred foot of Vishṇu – the water which becomes the very source of the *Ākāśa* (heavenly) Gaṅgā.

The Play's Authorship

Contrary to the usual practice in Sanskrit dramatic works, the author of the play is nowhere mentioned in the *Traivikramam*. This is reminiscent of the same omission in all thirteen plays collected in

Kerala, in 1909 and the years following, by Ganapati Sastri, and attributed by him to a pre-Kālidāsan poet, Bhāsa, on circumstantial evidence.

We have already noted M.R. Kavi's remark, quoted by M. Krishnamachariar, that if the play *Traivikramam* "is not the drama of Bhāsa, it may be ascribed to any of the Pallava kings, preferably to Mahēndra-vikrama or Narasiṁhavishṇu."

Without plunging into the entire, massive thicket of arguments over the 'Bhāsa Problem', and to limit the length of this paper, we will, with brief arguments to support it, firmly espouse the hypothesis that the author of *Traivikramam* was indeed King Mahēndra. Our reasoning is grounded in 25 years of evolving research on the two greatest Indian farcical comedies, *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam* and *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, both written by this great Pallava king.[9]

K. Kunjunni Raja, in the Introduction of N.P. Unni's book, *New Problems in Bhasa Plays*, notes that, in "Somadevasūri's *Yasastilakacampu*, a verse occurring in Mahendravikrama's *Mattavilāsa* is quoted, ascribing it to Mahākavi Bhāsa."[10] This verse is, indeed, the seventh ślōka of the *Mattavilāsa*:

Pēyā surā priyatamā-mukham-īkṣitavyaṁ
grāhyaḥ svabhāva-lalitō vikṛtaś-ca vēṣaḥ |

Yēnēdam-īdṛśam-adṛśyata mōkṣa-vartma
dīrghāyur-astu bhagavān sa pināka-pāṇiḥ ||7||

May the trident-armed Śiva forever reign!
who this way of salvation did thus ordain:

Drink liquor, beloved's face admire,
unselfconsciously wear outlandish attire! (7)

We shall proceed on the assumption that Sōmādēvasūri knew what he was talking about, and that "Bhāsa" is but one of the several *noms de plume* of King Mahēndra. In short, we would attribute most of the so-called "Bhāsa" plays to Mahēndra.

Then, consider another clue from the critics. Unni notes, again, that: "The manuscript [of *Dūtavākyam*, one of the "Bhāsa" plays,] with No. 10696 C . . . contains a peculiar colophon which may open up interesting avenues with regard to the problem of [its] authorship:"[11]

Kṛṣṇasya pāda-kamalaika-manā bhabhūva
vipraśca śaṅkara iti śrutavān jagatsu |

Āsīt sutôsya jagatāṁ parihāsa-kartā
sôjñôlikhat bhagavadajjuka-dūtavākyē ||[12]

This ślōka we translate into English prose as follows:

> There was a Vēdic scholar (*vipraś-ca*) renowned as a great benefactor (*śaṅkara*) of the world, one whose mind/heart was set on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. To him was born a son who was wise (*jñaḥ*) and who used to poke fun at the [whole] world. He wrote *Bhagavad-Ajjukam* and the *Dūtavākyam*.

From the beginning of our research in the 1970s, we have held the view that King Mahēndra wrote *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*.[13] Thus, according to this "peculiar" colophon, we learn that Mahēndra also wrote the play, *Dūtavākyam*, another of the so-called "Bhāsa" plays.[14] Mahēndra's father, King Siṁhavishṇu, is praised in the above ślōka as a Vēdic scholar, a great benefactor of the world, and a firm devotee of Kṛishṇa, one of the major incarnations of the god Vishṇu. We do know from historical sources that King Siṁhavishṇu was, in fact, a great devotee of the god Vishṇu.[15]

Among the thirteen plays "discovered" in Kerala by T. Ganapati Sastri, in 1909 and the years following, and attributed by him to an ancient playwright, Bhāsa, supposedly mentioned by the great poet

Kālidāsa in the prologue of his play *Mālavikāgnimitram*, was a play entitled *Cārudattam*. Unfortunately, the *Cārudattam* has come down to us in an incomplete form. It breaks off abruptly at the end of the fourth act. There is another play, *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, which seems to be a later adaptation of *Cārudattam*. The play, *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, arguably the second greatest play in Indian literature (after *Śākuntalam*), is complete in ten acts. The fact that its first four acts are so strikingly similar to the four acts of *Cārudattam* has led to the view among many scholars that it is a later adaptation of the *Cārudattam*.

The prologue of the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* attributes the authorship of this play to a King Śūdraka, who is said to have died at the age of 100 years and 10 days. Obviously, the original author, King Śūdraka, could not have written this part of the prologue. The prologue must be, in fact, an adaptation. As a radical solution to the larger enigma, we now suggest that, almost a century after *Cārudattam* was originally written, the great Sanskrit poet, Daṇḍin, adapted *Cārudattam*, christening his adaptation, *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. The new title, *Mṛcchakaṭikam* (*The Little Clay Cart*), derives from the seemingly insignificant scene in Act VI, where Cārudatta's little son, unhappy with his toy clay cart and wanting something better, is given gems by the courtesan, Vasantasēnā, so that he can have a toy cart made of gold. However, the real significance of the title is, perhaps, a suggested humble acknowledgment by Daṇḍin (a court poet) that his adaptation was but a 'little clay cart' compared to the 'golden cart' (the *Cārudattam*) – the original – written by the royal poet, King Śūdraka.

But who is this King Śūdraka? Our line of reasoning leads us to conclude that 'Śūdraka' is another *nom de plume* of King Mahēndra. In connection with Mahēndra's penchant for multiple names, consider the astonishing number of more than 120 different royal titles (*birudas*) of his engraved on his stone temples![16] Mahēndra had an unusual sense of humor, and delighted in several paradoxical *birudas*. If historians had had no knowledge of Mahēndra's authorship of his Sanskrit farcical drama entitled *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam*, what would they have made of his *biruda*, '*Mattavilāsaḥ*', which may be translated as 'Drunken sport'? At face value, it is not exactly the most complimentary royal title for a king. Or, again, the *biruda*, '*Virasaḥ*', which at face value translates to 'Tasteless' or 'Obscene'. Another *biruda* of his is '*Akaruṇaḥ*', 'The merciless'. And a final example, here, is '*Saṁkīrṇṇajātiḥ*', which, again at face value, means 'One of mixed caste'. (These negative 'face values' are countered by possibile positive readings – hence, the humor.) It can thus be demonstrated that Mahēndra was, indeed, a royal playwright who poked fun at the whole world, including himself.

We know from Daṇḍin's autobiographical introduction to his work, *Avantisundarī-Kathā*, that he was court poet to the Pallavas; and, from the evidence we have,[17] he was active as such in the latter part of the seventh century and early eighth, during the reigns of King Paramēśvaravarman-I and his son, Narasiṁhavarman-II ('Rājasiṁha'). Further, Daṇḍin informs us in his introductory remarks that the connection between his family and the Pallava kings had begun a century earlier, when his great grand-father, Dāmōdara, as an outstanding young poet, was invited by King Siṁhavishṇu to his court, and treated there as one of the king's own sons. The crown prince – the future King Mahēndra – must have been Dāmōdara's close companion and the young poet's outstanding literary disciple!

This close relationship between Dāmōdara and the prince may suggest an answer to the question why, contrary to tradition, the collection of thirteen plays attributed to "Bhāsa" by Ganapati Sastri all lacked any mention of an author. The suggestion we now put forward is that they were products of a brilliant collaboration between these two friends, Dāmōdara and the prince. A good number of the plays are short, rather unsophisticated works, probably written toward the beginning of the prince's literary efforts guided by Dāmōdara. Some others, such as the *Pratijñāyaugandarāyaṇam* and *Svapna-Vāsava-dattam*, rank among the best of Sanskrit dramas. The *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, which rivals the greatness of Kālidāsa's *Śākuntalam*, is but an adaptation by Daṇḍin of the *Cārudattam*, which was the original, written almost a century earlier by the then mature king, Mahēndra, under the *nom de plume* of 'Śūdraka'. Daṇḍin, the adapter, never claims credit for the play, but, in a sense, the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is a meta-creation by Mahēndra's teacher Dāmōdara's great grandson, Daṇḍin!

Indirect Indications of Mahēndra's Authorship of Many of the So-called Bhāsa Plays

[Adapting from Appendix C, Part 2:] D.R. Mankad, in his book, *The Types of Sanskrit Drama* (1936), speaking about the passage in King Mahēndra's play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, which reads:

> . . . *atha tu nāṭaka-prakaraṇōdbhavāsu vārēhāmṛga-ḍima-samavakāra-vyāyōga-bhāṇa-sallāpa-vīthy-utsṛṣṭikāṅka-prahasanādiṣu daśa-jātiṣu*. . . .

remarks that this passage

> evidently refers to a distinct principle of division, for *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa* are, here, taken as the basis of the other ten types, while according to the usual theory . . . they themselves form the first two types.[18]

M. Winternitz, commenting, in 1925, on the same passage of the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, had said:

> The list of ten Rūpakas, in all our Nāṭyaśāstras, includes the Nāṭaka and Prakaraṇa, while our author [of the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*] speaks of ten kinds of plays *sprung from* Nāṭaka and Prakaraṇa. . . .[19]

From those early years in the twentieth century up to the present time, scholars have puzzled over the above passage in the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*. It has been assumed that there are twelve types of drama which have been mentioned in it: 1) *nāṭaka*, 2) *prakaraṇa*, 3) *vāra*, 4) *īhāmṛga*, 5) *ḍima*, 6) *samavakāra*, 7) *vyāyōga*, 8) *bhāṇa*, 9) *sallāpa*, 10) *vīthī*, 11) *utsṛṣṭikāṅka*, 12) *prahasana*.

There are two problems with this assumption. First, the passage seems to be claiming that ten types of drama have 'sprung from' the *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa* – and thus the ten types *do not include* the *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa*! Second, nobody seems to be able to explain what type of drama '*vāra*' is.

Our solution to both these conundrums is to be found in the hermaphrodite image which infuses the very title of this play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, as well as the Rudra-Ardhanārī concept which lies at the heart of the Nāndī ślōka and of the play, itself. Just as the Bhagavan and Ajjukā are united in a single, hermaphrodite form, so also we should view '*Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa*', in the above passage, as a single 'hermaphrodite' form (the Mother-Father in One) – the single parent of the other, lesser types of drama.

As for the problem of the word '*vāra*', that is easily solved. '*Vāra*' is not the name of any type of drama! '*Vāra*' only means 'series', here, referring to the list of the nine lesser types of drama which follow, and which have 'sprung from' the hermaphrodite '*Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa*' parent. In this way, we end up with the 'ten types' which are required by the text and which are themselves the ground for the various rasas. This may seem like a strange classification, but this is comedy, and the playwright is King Mahēndravarman, who poked fun at the whole world![20]

The point we wish to make in this section is that this seemingly pedantic listing of the ten different types of drama may actually be a significant reference by the playwright (Mahēndra) to the fact that he (often in collaboration with Dāmōdara) had already composed plays in nine of these different genres, and that, now, he wanted to tackle the last, the prahasana (farcical comedy).

Viewing the ten forms of drama given in *Bhagavad-Ajjukam* from this perspective, we give the following sketch of them:

1. *Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa* – drama in its most complete form, having five to ten acts, with the *śṛṅgāra* or *vīra* rasa predominating. The *Nāṭaka* (sub-division) is distinguished by its plays following a well-known theme (taken from the epics or history) and having a high ranking hero (god, king, or great Brahmin) – e.g., the *Svapna-Vāsavadattam*, by the so-called "Bhāsa", whereas, in the *Prakaraṇa* (sub-division), its plays follows a made-up plot (invented by the playwright), and have a lower ranking hero, together with other characters who are either common types or even disreputable – e.g., the *Cārudattam/Mṛcchakaṭikam*, by "Bhāsa", a.k.a. "Śūdraka".

2. *Īhāmṛga* – a drama in which the hero abducts the heroine (as in the *Pratijñā-Yaugandharāyaṇam* – though, there, only as reported, *off stage* – the hero and heroine never appear on stage!).
3. *Ḍima* – a one act drama dealing with an affray or siege or some other violent action (e.g., the *Bālacaritam*, attributed to "Bhāsa").
4. *Samavakāra* – a 3-act drama containing a cooperative movement to a final resolution of strife (e.g., the *Pañcarātram*, attributed to "Bhāsa").
5. *Vyāyōga* – a one-act drama, full of fighting, heroics – few female characters (e.g., the *Madhyama-Vyāyōgam*, attributed to "Bhāsa").
6. *Bhāṇa* – a monologue, in one act, mainly dealing with love (e.g., the *Padmaprābhṛtakam*, by "Śūdraka").
7. *Sallāpa* – conversational dialogue on various subjects not necessarily connected (the *Dūtavākyam* has been considered a *Sallāpa*, but the device of the 'painted scroll' used in it would suggest to us that it is better categorized as a *Vīthī*).
8. *Vīthī* – 'street play' – one act (e.g., the *Dūtavākyam* and the *Traivikramam,* attributed to "Bhāsa").
9. *Utsṛṣṭikāṅka* – tragedy, 1-act (e.g., the *Ūrubhaṅgam* & *Karṇabhāram* & *Dūta-Ghaṭōtkacam*).
10. *Prahasana* – farce, one act (e.g., the *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam*, by King Mahēndra).

From this sketch of the ten different types of drama listed in the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, one can see that the plays attributed to "Bhāsa"/"Śūdraka"/Mahēndra provide examples for all of them. Of the three remaining "Trivandrum" plays not mentioned above, the *Abhiṣēka-Nāṭakam* and *Pratimā-Nāṭakam* are *Nāṭakas* – representing the *Nāṭaka*-half of the hermaphrodite '*Nātaka-Prakaraṇa*' parent. The *Avimārakam* represents the *Prakaraṇa* half of the hermaphrodite parent!

A well-known verse of Rājaśēkhara's, recorded in the *Sūktimuktāvali,* reads:

Bhāsa-nāṭakacakrēpi chēkaiḥ kṣiptē parīkṣitum ।
Svapnavāsavadattasya dāhakôbhūnna pāvakaḥ ॥

> When critics subjected Bhāsa's 'cycle of plays' (*'nāṭakacakra'*) to the test of fire, the *Svapnavāsavadattam* came out of the ordeal unscathed.

The term '*nāṭakacakra*' implies a number of *different* types of plays. Nobdy would call a collection of thirteen *prakaraṇas* or of thirteen *prahasanas* a 'cycle of plays'! And which playwright, we would ask, has ever discussed the '*nāṭakacakra*'? There is one and only one on record: King Mahēndra, in the Prologue of his comedy, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*!

There are many further directions research can take either to confirm or disconfirm our hypothesis that King Mahēndra is the 'Bhāsa' of the so-called Trivandrum plays – for instance, a careful, thorough comparison of the styles of the *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam* and *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, on the one hand, and the Trivandrum plays, on the other. Many scholars have taken the various deviations from the rules of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* found in the plays of 'Bhāsa'/'Śūdraka'/'Bōdhāyana' as evidence that these plays were written before that treatise came into prominence (a time probably not later than the fourth century, A.D.). We, on the contrary, see these same deviations as the expressions of one of the most original minds in the history of Indian literature, a mind nurtured in a creative, youthful – and, yes, rebellious! – collaboration with the young court poet, Dāmōdara, breaking many of those rules – the mind of the Pallava prince and king, Mahēndravikrama, whose life spanned the years from mid-sixth to mid-seventh century, A.D.

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Notes

[1]*Māmallapuram: A Guide to the Monuments,* by Michael Lockwood (Madras: Tambaram Research Associates).

[2]The word 'Sūtradhāra' is often translated in English as 'Director' or 'Producer'. The term 'Naṭī' may be translated as 'Actress'. The Sūtradhāra and Naṭī usually appear only in the prologues of Sanskrit plays. Their function there is to introduce the Play Proper, which is to "follow" the Prologue. But in this play (*Traivikramam*), there is no Prologue to any following Play Proper. Rather, the dialogue between the two actors forms the Play Proper, itself – a rather unusual play, a dramatic narrative. Elsewhere, in this book, we have studied in some detail the functions of the Sūtradhāra and his counterpart characters on stage, the Naṭī, the Vidūṣaka, or others.

[3]We have analyzed such a form in our sixth study, "Abhinavagupta's Discussion of Metadrama (c. 1000 A.D.)".

[4]*History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (Madras: Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Press, 1937), p. 688.

[5]Three available manuscripts of the *Traivikramam* are mentioned in N.P. Unni's book, *New Problems in Bhasa Plays* (Trivandrum, College Book House, 1978), pp. 85, 165, & 67, repectively: one manuscript, in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras (Chennai): MS No. R 3585F, a codex which contains seven dramas, including the *Traivikramam* and five of the thirteen plays ascribed to Bhāsa by Ganapati Sastri; and two manuscripts, in the Sanskrit College Library, Trippunithura, Cochin: MS No. 338 C, a codex which contains twenty dramas, including the *Traivikramam* and all thirteen plays originally ascribed to Bhāsa by Ganapati Sastri, and MS No. 338 M, a codex which also contains the *Traivikramam* and all thirteen plays originally ascribed to Bhāsa by Ganapati Sastri.

[6]*Māmallapuram: A Guide . . .,* pp. 61-63.

[7]*Pallava Architecture, Part II: Intermediate or Māmalla Period*, being *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 33*, 1928 (reprint: New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1982).

[8]Or Nāga King and *Princess*, according to Michael Rabe, in his book, *The Great Penance at Māmallapuram* (Chennai [Madras]: Institute of Asian Studies, 2001), pp. 69 & 142ff. Rabe's monograph is by far the most detailed study, to date, of the Great Penance Panel. In 1982, in *Māmallapuram and the Pallavas* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society), pp. 6ff., we were first to "entertain" the possibility that the Great Penance Panel could simultaneously portray both Arjuna's penance and King Bhagīratha's penance by its iconography, in the graphic art medium, mimicking the literary Sanskrit genre called *dvisaṁdhānakāvya*. In our book, we promptly dismissed this possibility. Rabe, however, has, in the main thrust of his monograph, eloquently, and with great breadth of vision, argued in its favor.

[9]Refer to Part Two of this book for our latest updated translation of the two plays, and for the many reasons we hold that both plays were written by King Mahēndra.

[10]*New Problems in Bhasa Plays*, p. 13.

[11]*Ibid.,* p. 44.

[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

[13]Important earlier scholars holding this view include C. Minakshi and V. Raghavan, both of whom have translated the play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam.*

[14]If King Mahēndra was indeed the author of the *Dūtavākyam*, then its Nāndī śl̄ōka would reveal another pointer to Mahēndra as the author of the *Traivikramam*!:

Pādaḥ pāyād-upēndrasya sarva-lōkōtsavas-sa vaḥ |
Vyāviddhō namucir-yēna tanu-tāmra-nakhēna khē ||

May Upēndra's foot protect you!
which, with nails tinged red,
Flung Namuchi headlong into the sky,
to the jubilation of all the worlds!

[15]E.g., from the following statement in lines Nos. 11 to 13 of the Udayēndiram Copper Plates of the Pallava King, Nandivarman-II: "*Ēvamanukramēṇa santatiparamparayābhivardhamānē pallavakulē bhakty-ārādhita-viṣṇuḥ siṁhaviṣṇuḥ* |"

[16]Refer to chapters 18 and 19 of our book, *Pallava Art* (Madras: Tambaram Research Associates, 2001), for a detailed study of King Mahēndra's more than 120 *birudas*, including the presentation of all of the facsimiles of these royal titles.

[17]For details, see Rabe, pp. 32ff.

[18]*The Types of Sanskrit Drama* (Karachi: Urmi Prakashan Mandir, 1936), p. 41.

[19]From the Preface of P. Anujan Achan's edition of *Bhagavadajjukīyam* (Trichur, Kerala: Mangalodayam Press, 1925), pp. viii-ix.

[20]In addition to the above, somewhat convoluted 'surface' meaning of the passage, there is also an important implied meaning suggested by the hermaphrodite expression '*Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa*': the word '*prakaraṇa*' suggests, at a meta-level, 'critical treatise(s)' and the word '*nāṭaka*' suggests 'creative (dramatic) art'. In Indian thought, that which is direct, immediate experience through the senses is represented by the creative feminine half of Ardhanārīśvara (Pārvatī), while that which involves meaning and critical faculties (requiring mediate reasoning) is represented by the masculine half of Ardhanārīśvara (Śiva). Thus, Mahēndra is, on this level, using the expression '*Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa*' to needle those scholars who swear only by the authority of critical treatises (the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* being the most notable of these treatises) and who, thus, would ignore the creative (feminine muse) side of literary inspiration and would advise young practitioners to slavishly follow these treatises in composing their works. With regard to the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, we have noted elsewhere that this tendency to swear by authority is exhibited by the Sūtradhāra, and that it humorously anticipates the Mendicant's habit of quoting authority every now and then. Mahēndra, in his two comedies, breaks many of the rules laid down in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. In the *Mattavilāsa*, there is drinking of not just water, but 'liquor', portrayed on stage, and the playwright even has the Naṭī shockingly berate the Sūtradhāra in the Prologue of the play. In the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, there is a death scene, with the corpse of the Courtesan lying on the stage floor. Again, there is water used in the course of the drama. And, though there is a substantial Prologue in this play, there is an astounding deliberate ignoring of any audience present by the Sūtradhāra and Vidūṣaka (for a detailed analysis of this deviation, see Chapter 5, "You or Us?" [pp. 35-38]). This willingness to let the creative muse take precedence over the rules laid down in 'critical treatises' is found again and again in the plays attributed to Bhāsa. For instance, in the *Cārudattam*, the Sūtradhāra enters, speaking Prakrit – not Sanskrit – though this is a Sanskrit play! And the Sūtradhāra is overshadowed by the Naṭī, who, in this play, can be considered the real Director/Producer – the Sūtradhārinī! Further, in the Play Proper, this Sūtradhārinī (the Naṭī) plays the part of the Courtesan, Vasantasēnā, and is its *leading character* – not Cārudatta! This is the only example in the whole range of classical Sanskrit drama where the leading character is a female. Even in the earlier short plays by Bhāsa (Mahēndra), there is a freshness in the different treatment of episodes taken from the epics. For instance, consider the play, *Ūrubhaṅgam*, the only full-blown tragedy found in classical Sanskrit drama, a genre not even acknowledged in the *Nāṭya-*

Śāstra. The unusually sympathetic treatment, in this play, of the ordinarily demonized character of Duryōdhana may be due to the fact that the Pallava kings traced their ancestry back through Aśvatthāman and Drōṇa (Drōṇa, the chief military preceptor of the Kauravas, and Drōṇa's son, Aśvatthāman, who fought on the side of the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas). To repeat from our paper's closing sentence, the thrust of our argument, in a nutshell, is that whereas many

> scholars have taken the various deviations from the rules of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* found in the plays of 'Bhāsa'/'Śūdraka'/'Bōdhāyana' as evidence that these plays were written before that treatise came into prominence (a time probably not later than the fourth century, A.D.), . . . [we], on the contrary, see these same deviations as the expressions of one of the most original minds in the history of Indian literature . . . – the mind of the Pallava prince and king, Mahēndravikrama, whose life spanned the years from mid-sixth to mid-seventh century, A.D.

Addendum 2005

> Then Criticism the Muse's handmaid prov'd,
> To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd:
> But following wits from that intention strayed,
> Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid.
>
> (Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism", ll. 102-5)

Our study of the 'structure of Sanskrit drama' had its beginning, in 1974, with our maiden effort to edit and translate King Mahēndra's play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*. Throughout the years that have followed, it has been the further study of this play which most often has offered us new insights. The playwright has truly been our teacher! This fact has brought us to the realization that in the play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, Mahēndra has created a dramatic critique of the concept of the 'Prahasana' (the Farce). Pope chose the vehicle of poetry for his critique of the relationship between the creative Muse and the analytic 'maid', 'Criticism'. Mahēndra, on the other hand, has chosen to elucidate the concept of the 'Prahasana' through the medium of a stage-production. In this way Mahēndra has brought about a union of 'Creation' (Nāṭaka [= *Rūpaka*, 'play' – general term]) and 'Criticism' (Prakaraṇa). In the Indian context, this union can be represented as the hermaphrodite, 'Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa' (to which, the cognomens '*Saṅkīrṇajātiḥ*' and '*Ardhanārīśvaraḥ*' may be applied)! In the Western context, the union of Pope's Muse and her handmaid, in *his* poem, would be lesbian in nature!

In the Prastāvanā (Prologue) of the play, *Bhagavad-Ajjukam*, the Sūtradhāra informs his companion, the Vidūṣaka, that a fortune-teller has predicted that in seven days he (the Sūtradhāra) is going to put on a play at the royal palace. When the Vidūṣaka asks him which play he is going to put on, the Sūtradhāra answers, "I'm going to put on a farce." The Vidūṣaka pleads ignorance of that type of comedy:

Vidūṣaka: Sir, though I'm a comedian, I know nothing of Farcical Comedy.

Sūtradhāra: Then learn! One can't understand a thing without being taught!

Vidūṣaka: If so, it's you, sir, who must teach me.

Sūtradhāra: Certainly.

> Since you are determined to become enlightened,
> a follower of the path of virtue . . .
>
> As a disciple, follow me!
> a bull of a Brahmin mendicant, master yōgi. (2)

Mahēndra has the Sūtradhāra teaching the Vidūṣaka by means of a practical demonstration in which the Sūtradhāra plays the role of a teacher/guru (the Parivrājaka), while the Vidūṣaka plays the role

of the taught (the disciple, Śāṇḍilya). The entire play thus has a double order of correlated references: (1) the Sūtradhāra teaching and the Vidūṣaka learning what a Prahasana is, and (2) the Parivrājaka, with his unripe wisdom, trying to teach and Śāṇḍilya, with his total unwillingness, refusing to learn – all of which gives rise to a Prahasana – a model of *the* Prahasana. In view of this double order of correlated references, the play demands of the reader/spectator a constant awareness of the double vision, necessitated by the presence of the underlying drama (the subterranian continuation of the Prologue) in addition to that of the outer, more visible drama. How does this double vision operate? Specifically, in this way: we see the characters of the Parivrājaka and Śāṇḍilya in their respective costumes acting out the plot of the Play Proper, but at the same time, we are aware that we have here the characters of the Sūtradhāra and the Vidūṣaka playing the parts of the Parivrājaka and Śāṇḍilya, acting out the plot of the Prologue – the teaching and learning of what a 'farce' is by means of an actual 'extempore', 'private' production of one.

The 'outer, more visible action' and the 'underlying, more hidden action' prescribe two levels of perception: (1) that of viewing the farcical comedy, itself: the interaction of the Parivrājaka, Śāṇḍilya, and the other characters of the Play Proper, and (2) that of making out the interaction between the Sūtradhāra (playing the Parivrājaka) and the Vidūṣaka (playing Śāṇḍilya) and of enjoying this demonstration of the theoretical aspects of the farcical comedy (Prahasana).

The *Bhagavad-Ajjukam* is thus fit to be called a Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa – an instance of Mahēndra's genius, his ability to innovate. The play proper is, indeed, an exposition of the Prahasana type of drama, and in bringing this off, Mahēndra has created a new type of play which can be called the 'Nāṭaka-Prakaraṇa', wherein we see the hermaphroditic type of union of 'Creation' and 'Criticism'.

Theoretically, this approach could be applied to any one of the ten types of drama, and many of the extant classical Sanskrit dramas may be viewed in this framework. But the Prahasana, as full-blown classical dramas (as in the *Bhagavad-Ajjukam* and *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam*), must have been a unique creation by King Mahēndra in the theater practice of his day.

Benediction

Namaḥ Saṅkīrṇajātayē! Namaḥ Ardhanārīśvarāya!

(Salutations to *Saṅkīrṇajāti*! Salutations to *Ardhanārīśvara*!)

Select Bibliography
of Works Dealing with 'Metadrama' and 'Metatheater'*

This select bibliography is presented because of the conviction that the structure of classical Sanskrit plays can be better understood from a perspective which is aware of world-wide research on the topic, 'metadrama/metatheater', and that Sanskrit plays, themselves, provide some of the best material for such research.

This bibliography is not exhaustive, but it should enable the formation of a reasonable idea of what kind of research has been going on in the area of 'metadrama/metatheater' since 1963, when Lionel Abel's seminal book, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, was published – a book in which, it is claimed, the term 'metatheater' was first coined. Of course, those aspects of drama to which the terms 'metatheater' and 'metadrama' refer were present from the very beginning of dramatic art. Abel's contribution was the coining of a conceptual term for these aspects – and his discussion launched this important area of research in the West. (In India, the discussion of the equivalent Sanskrit terms goes back to Abhinava-gupta, c. 1000 A.D., and, before that, to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*.)

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